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Transparency in Crisis: Exploring Supply and Demand for Government Data in Venezuela

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Transparency in Crisis: Exploring Supply and Demand for Government Data in Venezuela

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Abstract

Transparency in Crisis: Exploring Supply and Demand for Government Data in Venezuela

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Publicly accessible government information is necessary for Venezuelan citizens to hold their government accountable, especially as the political, economic, and health crisis worsens. Not only is the implementation of these laws costly, but there is often a perceived lack of citizen demand for transparency that further erodes the political will to carry out transparency initiatives. To facilitate the successful implementation of freedom of information laws in Venezuela, it is necessary to build political will by presenting concrete evidence that citizen demand exists. This study aims to find whether there is a demand for government transparency among Venezuelan citizens by proposing a survey experiment to test the hypothesis that reporting on a candidate's transparency accomplishments increases their approval rating. The design and theoretical framework of this study were informed by interviews in Caracas, Venezuela with public officials who provide government data and civil society actors who demand it, as well as by a pilot

experiment using a student sample from the University of Texas at Austin. When I repeat this experiment in Venezuela, I expect to find that the transparency treatment will have a positive effect on approval ratings. This study will fill a gap in the literature about citizen demand for transparency in non-democratic, developing countries with high levels of government corruption and data opacity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a result of government corruption, bad policymaking, and falling oil prices, Venezuela faces skyrocketing inflation and widespread shortages of basic services, staple foods, and medical supplies.[1] To make matters worse, Venezuela has seen an increase in human rights violations, intolerance of dissent, and dwindling democratic freedoms in the last few years.[2] In addition to political repression, lack of publicly accessible government data prevents citizens from holding their government accountable. Government transparency and accountability initiatives, such as freedom of information laws and participatory budgeting, are becoming increasingly popular in Latin America. Meanwhile, Venezuela is trailing behind. Aside from federal anti-corruption legislation, Venezuela has yet to adopt either transparency or freedom of information laws. What's more, Venezuela scored 18 out of 100 on Transparency International's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)[3], and is among the ten worst performing countries in the world on the Open Budget Index, with a budget openness of "scant or none."[4]

One of the biggest challenges to implementing successful transparency laws is a lack of political will on the supply side (i.e. the government). Not only is the

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[1] "Venezuela Country Profile," *BBC*, May 21, 2018, Accessed at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19649648

[2] "Freedom in the World 2018: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, 2018, Accessed at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/venezuela

[3] "Corruption Perceptions Index 2017," *Transparency International*, 2017, Accessed at https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017

[4] "Open Budget Survey 2017," *International Budget Partnership*, 2017, Accessed at https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/open-budget-survey-2017-report-english.pdf

implementation of these laws costly, but there is often a perceived lack of citizen demand for transparency that further erodes the political will to carry out transparency initiatives. To facilitate the successful implementation of freedom of information laws in Venezuela, it is necessary to build political will by presenting concrete evidence that citizen demand exists. This study aims to find whether there is a demand for government transparency among Venezuelan citizens by testing the hypothesis that reporting on a candidate's transparency accomplishments increases their approval rating. I theorize that a public official who makes additional efforts to be transparent (on top of what is already required by law) will be perceived as less corrupt and more trustworthy by their constituents, and therefore receive higher approval ratings from citizens.

Testing this theory in the real world is very difficult, particularly in politically and economically volatile settings such as contemporary Venezuela. Nonetheless, probing this nascent hypothesis about the links between transparency and constituent trust is a critical question for modern democracies. This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between transparency and trust through a proof-of-concept study that lays the foundations for future fieldwork in Venezuela once the political situation stabilizes enough to enable fieldwork. For now, this thesis seeks to examine transparency and trust by deploying the general hypothesis that providing constituents with information about a candidate's transparency accomplishments increases their approval rating among citizens. This hypothesis is supported by previous research, which has found a statistically significant positive relationship between perception of government transparency and enhanced trust in

government[5], as well as with higher levels of government approval[6] and increased perceived effectiveness of leaders.[7] This study will fill a gap in the literature about citizen demand for transparency in non-democratic, developing countries with high levels of government corruption and data opacity.

The design and theoretical framework of this study were informed by interviews in Caracas, Venezuela with public officials who provide government data and civil society actors who demand it, as well as by a pilot experiment using a student sample from the University of Texas at Austin. When I repeat this experiment in Venezuela in the near future, I expect to find that the transparency treatment will have a positive effect on approval ratings, but that the positive effect will be lower in Venezuela than in the United States. The literature suggests that in situations of economic crisis, trust in government tends to goes down[8], particularly among less educated and working class citizens who typically fair worse during economic downturns.[9] Trust in government is also low in countries with low institutional capacity[10] and high levels of political polarization[11]

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5 Changsoo Song and Jooho Lee, "Citizens' use of social media in government, perceived transparency, and trust in government," *Public Performance & Management Review* 39, no. 2 (2015): 430.

6 James E. Alt, David Dreyer Lassen, and David Skilling, "Fiscal Transparency, Gubernatorial Approval, and the Scale of Government: Evidence from the States," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (2002): 230-50.

7 Steven M. Norman, Bruce J. Avolio, and Fred Luthans, "The impact of positivity and transparency on trust in leaders and their perceived effectiveness," *The Leadership Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2010): 350-64.

8 Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph, "*Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*," Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press (2015): 142.

9 Chase Foster and Jeffry Frieden, "Crisis of trust: Socio-economic determinants of Europeans' confidence in government," *European Union Politics* 18, no. 4 (2017): 511-35.

10 Marc L. Hutchison and Kristin Johnson, "Capacity to trust? Institutional capacity, conflict, and political trust in Africa, 2000-2005," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 6 (2011): 737-52.

11 Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph, "*Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*," 47.

because people become disenchanted with the government's ineffectiveness. Therefore, I theorize that Venezuelan citizens will care less about government transparency because they have more pressing priorities, such as feeding themselves, or because they already have such low levels of trust in the government.

There are two major research questions underlying this thesis, with related sub-questions. First, what is the current state of government transparency in Venezuela? Specifically, what obstacles do public servants face in providing data, what is their rationale for either completing or denying requests for information by the public, and how difficult is it for members of civil society to access different types of government data? Second, do Venezuelans care about government transparency and does this affect how they vote? More pointedly, does reporting on a candidate's transparency accomplishments increase their approval rating, and do Venezuelan citizens react positively or negatively to perceived transparency? To answer these questions and explore the broader relationship between transparency and political trust, this thesis is divided into four chapters.

Chapter one will provide relevant background information on Venezuela, review the literature available on the subject of government transparency, present the theoretical framework supporting my hypotheses, describe the methodology I used to test these hypotheses, and justify the importance of this research. Chapter two will delve into the qualitative portion of my research and present the findings of my interviews in Caracas, Venezuela. The third chapter will cover the design and results of my pilot experiment at

the University of Texas at Austin. The fourth and final chapter will present the design of my proposed experiment in Caracas, Venezuela.

BACKGROUND

The Venezuelan government's increasing opacity is closely tied to the demise of democracy in the country. Democratic backsliding began under President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías in the early 2000s. After a failed coup d'état by the opposition against Chávez in 2002, the National Assembly passed the Law on Social Responsibility of Radio and Television, which allowed the government to punish the media for expressing dissent. As a result, opposition media outlets in Venezuela began slowly disappearing until the media was almost completely under government control. In 2009, President Chávez won a referendum calling for the elimination of presidential term limits, giving himself the opportunity to remain in power indefinitely. His government also frequently jailed opposition leaders, judges, and media figures for allegedly inciting violent protests, subjecting them to trials behind closed doors.[12] These repressive actions were possible because the judicial and legislative branches were controlled by the ruling party. The same was true for nearly all government institutions, including the Supreme Court and the National Electoral Council.

Since Chavez's passing in 2013, Venezuela has been facing a severe economic crisis marked by skyrocketing inflation and widespread shortages of basic goods, services,

[12] Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, "How Democracies Die," New York: Crown (2018).

and medical supplies. Although the Central Bank of Venezuela has not released official inflation rates since December of 2014, the International Monetary Fund estimates that inflation will skyrocket to 13,000 percent in 2018[13], while other sources estimate that inflation has already surpassed 25,000 percent.[14] Due to hyperinflation, low-income families cannot afford to buy food at local market prices. Instead, they rely on the government to regulate the prices of staple foods and other essential products such as corn meal, cooking oil, rice, flour, milk, and toilet paper, all of which are carefully rationed due to their high demand. These shortages have also extended to critical medical supplies such as antibiotics, anesthesia, gauze, gloves, and even doctors, which has resulted in the collapse of Venezuela's health care system.[15] Despite the growing humanitarian crisis, current President Nicolas Maduro refuses to accept international aid.[16]

While falling oil prices certainly contributed to the economic downturn, bad policymaking and rampant government corruption are also largely to blame. High tax rates, price controls, expropriations, and strict regulation of currency exchange markets led domestic producers to operate at a loss. As a result, many manufacturers chose to cut back production, close down their businesses, or move production out of the country. These

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[13] David Biller, "IMF Projects Venezuela Inflation Will Soar to 13,000 Percent in 2018," *Bloomberg*, January 25, 2018, Accessed at https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-25/imf-sees-venezuela-inflation-soaring-to-13-000-percent-in-2018

[14] Steve Hanke, "Venezuela's Inflation Breaches 25,000%," *Forbes*, May 31, 2018, Accessed at https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevehanke/2018/05/31/venezuelas-inflation-breaches-25000/#104373926d57

[15] Danielle Renwick, "Venezuela in Crisis," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 23, 2018, Accessed at https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-crisis

[16] Samantha Raphelson, "Venezuela's Health Care System Ready To Collapse Amid Economic Crisis," *NPR*, February 1, 2018, Accessed at https://www.npr.org/2018/02/01/582469305/venezuelas-health-care-system-ready-to-collapse-amid-economic-crisis

economic policies opened the door for increased corruption, black-market activities, and cooperation between government officials and organized crime. In 2015, several Venezuelan public officials were under criminal investigation in the United States for drug trafficking, bribery, and money laundering. According to a report by Freedom House, the Venezuelan suspects included "managers at the national oil company, a former intelligence chief, the commander of the National Guard, the head of the National Assembly, and two nephews of President Maduro's wife."[17]

The regime grew more authoritarian after Chávez's hand-picked successor, Nicolas Maduro, took power in 2013. As the ruling party[18] continued to consolidate its control over the state, the National Assembly became one of the few opposition-held branches of government openly challenging Maduro's policies. In response, the Supreme Court, packed with government loyalists, temporarily sidelined opposition lawmakers and assumed their legislative responsibilities. After several contentious months, elections were held in 2017 for a parallel legislative body—a 545-member National Constituent Assembly. The newly formed Constituent Assembly, dominated by regime sympathizers, was given the power to draft a new constitution.[19]

The Supreme Court's actions resulted in mass street protests, precipitating a series of violent confrontations between security forces and anti-government demonstrators.

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17 "Freedom in the World 2016: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, 2016, Accessed at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/venezuela

18 The United Socialist Party of Venezuela, founded by late President Hugo Chávez and now led by President Nicolas Maduro.

19 "Freedom in the World 2018: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, 2018, Accessed at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/venezuela

Security forces and armed pro-regime militias, or "colectivos," were directly responsible for the majority of the 136 protester deaths between April and September of the same year. By the end of July 2017, over 600 political prisoners had been detained for taking part in anti-regime activities.[20] With such severe restrictions imposed by the Venezuelan government, citizens have little to no incentive to speak out against the ruling party in fear of retaliation from the authorities.

In addition to political repression, lack of publicly accessible government data limits citizens' ability to hold their government accountable. Venezuela scored 18 out of 100 on Transparency International's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)[21], and is among the ten worst performing countries in the world on the Open Budget Index, with a budget openness of "scant or none."[22] However, the CPI is based on attitudinal surveys with country experts (usually expatriates) and business people[23], whose priorities and experiences with corruption, accountability, and transparency in the public sector might differ greatly from those of other members of Venezuelan civil society. I conducted qualitative research in Venezuela to independently assess the current state of government transparency in the country and capture a wider range of experiences.

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[20] "Freedom in the World 2018: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, 2018, Accessed at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/venezuela

[21] "Corruption Perceptions Index 2017," *Transparency International*, 2017, Accessed at https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017

[22] "Open Budget Survey 2017," *International Budget Partnership*, 2017, Accessed at https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/open-budget-survey-2017-report-english.pdf

[23] Theresa Thompson and Anwar Shah, "*Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index: Whose Perceptions Are They Anyway?*" Washington, DC: World Bank (2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Michener and Bersch define transparency in terms of visibility and inferability of information.[24] To be visible, information must be recorded either visually, audibly, or in writing. For example, a speech in which a public official provides information to the public is not considered fully transparent unless the government provides a video recording or transcript of said speech. Inferability, on the other hand, is the ability to draw accurate conclusions from the visible information. In other words, visible information must also be accurate, verifiable, and useful to the public in order to be considered "inferable." Michener and Bersch use these two dimensions of transparency to assess its quality, ranging from poor quality (low visibility and no inferability) to high quality (high visibility and high inferability).[25]

Transparency with low inferability may impede certain sectors of the population from enjoying the benefits of increased transparency. For example, citizens with lower education might lack adequate tools to interpret complex data, making them less effective at monitoring policymakers and holding them accountable. Using cross-country multilevel data, Cicatiello, De Simone, and Gaeta find that citizens with more education enjoy higher levels of external political efficacy (i.e. greater government responsiveness) as a result of increased government transparency.[26] Therefore, the authors argue that governments

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[24] Gregory Michener and Katherine Bersch, "Identifying Transparency," *Information Polity* 18 (2013): 233-242.
[25] Ibid, 234.
[26] Lorenzo Cicatiello, Elina de Simone, and Giuseppe Lucio Gaeta, "Cross-Country Heterogeneity in Government Transparency and Citizens' Political Efficacy: A Multilevel Empirical Analysis," *Administration & Society* (2016): 1-29.

should not only provide information, but also improve its ease-of-use and interpretability so that citizens with lower education can fully benefit from it as well.[27]

The open data movement is a good example of the increasing demand for inferability. This movement advocates for the provision of "raw" data that is verifiable, accurate, and easy-to-find through searchable platforms. Governments around the world are joining initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, through which the public can access government data as well as visualizations and tools for analysis.[28]

Greater access to visible and inferable information increases citizens' ability to monitor the government, hold public officials accountable, and deter abuses of power.[29] Benito and Bastida find that reducing information asymmetry between government and citizens can also have a positive effect on political participation in the form of increased electoral turnout.[30] By having more access to government information, citizens have a greater incentive to vote.

However, increasing transparency alone is rarely enough to combat corruption and improve the quality of governance. Transparency only works when coupled with other

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[27] Lorenzo Cicatiello, Elina de Simone, and Giuseppe Lucio Gaeta, "Cross-Country Heterogeneity in Government Transparency and Citizens' Political Efficacy: A Multilevel Empirical Analysis," 23-24.

[28] Gregory Michener and Katherine Bersch, "Identifying Transparency," 236.

[29] John Carey, "*Legislative Voting and Accountability*," Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (2009).

[30] Bernardino Benito and Francisco Bastida, "Budget Transparency, Fiscal Performance, and Political Turnout: An International Approach," *Public Administration Review* 69, no. 3 (2009): 410.

policies, such as increasing accountability and political participation among the citizenry.[31] Fox's definition of accountability distinguishes between hard (when officials face actual consequences for their actions) and soft (when citizens lack adequate means to sanction public officials) accountability.[32] When a government institution provides access to information without having to answer for its actions, Fox argues that it can be considered transparent but not accountable.

Although increasing government transparency is insufficient by itself, it is a necessary first step for improving democratic governance and the focus of this study. More specifically, this study will address the two sides of government transparency: supply and demand. In other words, public servants who provide government data and citizens who consume (and presumably act upon) that information.

On the supply side, there are multiple challenges that obstruct the implementation of freedom of information laws. For instance, the relationship between citizens who seek access to government information and those who provide it can often be adversarial.[33] This is especially the case in authoritarian countries or illiberal democracies with cultures of bureaucratic secrecy where public servants fear repercussions if they provide government

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[31] Stephen Kosack and Archon Fung, "Does Transparency Improve Governance?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 65-87.

[32] Jonathan Fox, "The Uncertain Relationship between Transparency and Accountability," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4 (2007): 663-671.

[33] Michele Bush Kimball, "Shining the Light From the Inside: Access Professionals' Perceptions of Government Transparency," *Communication Law & Policy* 17, no. 1 (2012): 299.

information.[34] Adversarial relationships between supply and demand sides might be even stronger in highly polarized political environments. From the interviews I conducted in Venezuela, I learned that the staff of pro-government officials are hesitant to provide public information due to fear of retaliation if the information is used to criticize the government. The staff of officials affiliated with the opposition, on the other hand, do not share this fear of retaliation and are therefore more willing to comply with citizen information requests.

Other factors that hinder government transparency include insufficient funding, capacity, resources, and lack of political will.[35] Several studies have found that larger cities tend to be more transparent than smaller cities.[36] This might be because larger cities have more resources to make information available to citizens. According to the 2011 International City/County Management Association survey, 42 percent of local governments identified a lack of financial resources as a top barrier in providing e-government services.[37]

Public servants in richer local governments tend to have more money, time, technology, and/or staff available to implement transparency laws. Public servants in resource-starved local governments, on the other hand, might show less willingness to

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[34] Laura Neuman and Richard Calland, "Making the Access to Information Law Work: The Challenges of Implementation," In *The Right to Know: Transparency for an Open World*, Ann Florini, ed, New York: Columbia University Press (2007): 4, 10.

[35] Laura Neuman and Richard Calland, "Making the Access to Information Law Work: The Challenges of Implementation," 4, 10.

[36] Daniel Albalate del Sol, "The institutional, economic and social determinants of local government transparency," *Journal of Economic Policy Reform* 16 (2013): 90-107; Alan K. Styles and Mack Tennyson, "The accessibility of financial reporting of U.S. municipalities on the internet," *Journal of Public Budgeting*, *Accounting & Financial Management*, 19 (2007): 56-92.

[37] "E-Government Survey," *International City/County Management Association (ICMA)*, 2011, Accessed at http://icma.org/en/icma/knowledge_network/documents/kn/Document/302947/EGovernment_2011_Survey_Summary

implement transparency laws because they are underpaid, understaffed, and/or lack proper training. Without the relevant knowledge and skills to handle large data sets, public servants might end up unintentionally providing misleading or inaccurate data.[38] Public officials might also have a difficult time providing data when they themselves lack access to information from other bodies of government or from within their own agency.[39]

Despite these numerous obstacles, Neuman and Calland argue that the most important hurdle to overcome is a lack of commitment to the implementation of transparency laws among those on the supply side.[40] Overworked public servants might be reluctant to comply with freedom of information laws, perceiving them as an extra burden.[41] In addition, several studies have found that public sector employees tend to be more risk-averse than their private sector counterparts, possibly because risk-averse people prefer the security of public sector jobs.[42] Due to their risk oriented attitude, public servants tend to be skeptical of innovation, structural changes, or adoption of new technologies needed to implement open government policies.

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38 Taewoo Nam, "Challenges and Concerns of Open Government: A Case of Government 3.0 in Korea," *Social Science Computer Review* 33, no. 5 (2015): 561.

39 Jennifer Shkabatur, "Transparency With(out) Accountability: Open Government in the United States." *Yale Law & Policy Review* 31, no. 1 (2013): 79–140.

40 Laura Neuman and Richard Calland, "Making the Access to Information Law Work: The Challenges of Implementation," 10, 2-3.

41 Suzanne J. Piotrowski, "Government transparency in the path of administrative reform," Albany: State University of New York Press (2007); Suzanne J. Piotrowski and David Rosenbloom, "Nonmission-based values in results-oriented public management: The case of freedom of information," *Public Administration Review*, 62 (2002): 643–657.

42 Bernd Wirtz, Sebastian Lütje, and Paul G. Schierz, "An Empirical Analysis of the Acceptance of E-Procurement in the German Public Sector," *International Journal of Public Administration* 33, no. 1 (2009): 26–42; Margaretha Buurman, Josse Delfgaauw, Robert Dur, and Seth Van den Bossche, "Public Sector Employees: Risk Averse and Altruistic?" *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 83, no. 3 (2012): 1–25.

A public servant's length of service might be another factor affecting political will to implement transparency policies. A more experienced public official might embrace transparency as a mechanism for delivering high-quality local government services. By the same token, long service in public sector positions may produce a disinclination to change standard operating procedures that appear to be serving the community well. For example, Zeemering found that longtime county administrators were less supportive of exploring new opportunities related to service provision than less-seasoned administrators were.[43]

Generating political will is not possible without an equally committed demand side. Public servants tend to be more politically engaged with the implementation of freedom of information laws when these laws are passed to meet a civil society demand.[44] Furthermore, implementing transparency regulations can be very costly in terms of resources required (e.g. time, funding, labor, technology, infrastructure, training, etc.). Governments are often unwilling to allocate some of these resources towards implementation of transparency initiatives if they perceive an insufficient desire for information on behalf of citizens.[45] A study by Bearfield and Bowman found that when public servants perceive that citizens do not want or will not use the information, they are less likely to place the data online.[46] Before funneling resources into demand-focused

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[43] Eric Zeemering, "California county administrators as sellers and brokers of interlocal cooperation," *State and Local Government Review*, 41, no. 3 (2009): 166-181.

[44] Laura Neuman and Richard Calland, "Making the Access to Information Law Work: The Challenges of Implementation," 10, 2-3.

[45] Ibid, 20-24.

[46] Domonic Bearfield and Ann O'M Bowman, "Can you find it on the web? An assessment of municipal E-government transparency," *The American Review of Public Administration* 47, no.2 (2017): 5.

transparency initiatives, we have to answer the following fundamental question: do citizens care about government transparency?

Previous research has found a statistically significant positive relationship between perception of government transparency and enhanced trust in government.[47] Song and Lee examine the relationship between citizen interaction with state-run social media accounts and their level of trust in government by using 2009 national survey data from the Pew Research Center. The study finds that use of government social media can increase citizens' level of trust in government only when it heightens their perception of government transparency. The authors argue that government social media services can streamline communication between public officials and their constituents, as well as serve as an effective means to disseminate up-to-date government information in a timely manner. When government social media services are used for these purposes, they strengthen citizens' perception of government transparency and thereby increase their level of trust in government.[48]

Government transparency has also been found to have a positive association with higher approval levels.[49] Using cross-sectional data for American states between 1986 and 1995, Alt, Lasen, and Skilling find that higher levels of fiscal transparency are associated with increased gubernatorial approval. More specifically, a one-unit increase in the fiscal

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47 Changsoo Song and Jooho Lee, "Citizens' use of social media in government, perceived transparency, and trust in government," 430.

48 Ibid, 445.

49 James E. Alt, David Dreyer Lassen, and David Skilling, "Fiscal Transparency, Gubernatorial Approval, and the Scale of Government: Evidence from the States," 230.

transparency index increases average approval ratings by 1.5 percent, independent of other factors. In other words, governors of states that publish detailed budget information enjoy higher approval levels from their constituents.[50]

These studies suggest that levels of trust in government are higher when there is more information available about government actions and efforts, with increased access to government information leading citizens to believe that the government is acting in their best interest.[51] Higher levels of confidence in politicians then translate into higher approval ratings.[52] In this vein, my main research hypothesis is that public officials who make additional efforts to be transparent will be perceived as more trustworthy and therefore receive higher approval ratings from citizens.

Hypothesis 1: Public officials who make additional efforts to be transparent will receive higher approval ratings from citizens

Other research has found that government transparency has a limited effect on trust in government. Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer conducted an online experiment in which four groups of subjects visited different government websites in the Netherlands with varying degrees of transparency (low to high) and policy outcomes (good or bad). Their study found that the relationship between government transparency and trust in government is moderated by citizens' general predisposition to trust government and their prior

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[50] James E. Alt, David Dreyer Lassen, and David Skilling, "Fiscal Transparency, Gubernatorial Approval, and the Scale of Government: Evidence from the States," 240.

[51] Changsoo Song and Jooho Lee, "Citizens' use of social media in government, perceived transparency, and trust in government," 430, 437.

[52] James E. Alt, David Dreyer Lassen, and David Skilling, "Fiscal Transparency, Gubernatorial Approval, and the Scale of Government: Evidence from the States," 231-233.

knowledge about specific issues.[53] Individuals with high prior knowledge about an issue are primarily driven by that knowledge. Therefore, their level of trust in government is unaffected by increased transparency. Citizens with low prior knowledge, on the other hand, are more influenced by transparency. If transparency reveals a positive policy outcome, their level of trust in government increases.[54] These results suggest that trust in government is determined far more by pre-existing ideas, knowledge, and attitudes towards the government than one-time experiences with high levels of government transparency and positive policy outcomes.[55]

A similar study found that government transparency actually had a negative effect on trust in government. This finding is also based on an experiment in which six groups of subjects were exposed to different government websites with varying degrees of transparency (low to high) and policy stages (decision-making, policy proposal, and policy outcome). Three of the groups were based in the Netherlands and the other three were in South Korea.[56] The results show that the transparency treatment had a negative effect on trust in government in both countries, but the negative effect was stronger in South Korea. The authors attribute this variation to differences between the political cultures of each

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53 Stephan G. Grimmelikhuijsen and Albert J. Meijer, "Effects of transparency on the perceived trustworthiness of a government organization: Evidence from an online experiment," Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 24, no. 1 (2014): 137-57.

54 Ibid, 153.

55 Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, "Linking transparency, knowledge and citizen trust in government: an experiment," International Review of Administrative Sciences 78, no. 1 (2012): 63-67.

56 Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Gregory Porumbescu, Boram Hong, and Tobin Im, "The Effect of Transparency on Trust in Government: A Cross-National Comparative Experiment," *Public Administration Review* 73, no. 4 (2013): 581.

country. More specifically, South Korea's political culture has a stronger focus on long-term policy goals and a higher prevalence of paternalistic relationships between leaders and citizens.[57]

Taking these two findings into account, my second research hypothesis is that candidates that make additional efforts to be transparent will not experience a statistically significant effect on their approval ratings, or the effect will be significant but negative.

Hypothesis 2: Public officials who make additional efforts to be transparent will receive lower approval ratings from citizens

Null Hypothesis: Additional efforts to be transparent will have no effect on public officials' approval ratings from citizen

All of these studies were conducted in developed countries with lower levels of government corruption and higher levels of government transparency. For developing countries such as Venezuela, a common finding in the literature is that voting preferences and actual voting behavior change when citizens have increased access to higher quality information.[58] Additionally, informed voters in these countries tend to prefer more honest politicians.[59] This research supports my main research hypothesis in both Venezuela and the United States.

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[57] Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Gregory Porumbescu, Boram Hong, and Tobin Im, "The Effect of Transparency on Trust in Government: A Cross-National Comparative Experiment," 579-583.

[58] Rohini Pande, "Can informed voters enforce better governance? Experiments in low-income democracies," *Annual Review of Economics* 3, no. 1 (2011): 220-229.

[59] Ibid, 220-229.

However, since Venezuela is also an autocracy, it is important to examine the literature on the relationship between transparency and regime type. One study found that democracies are more likely to publish policy relevant information than autocracies.[60] Yet, authoritarian governments are increasingly embracing freedom of information laws or policies. The research on this topic suggests that there are various reasons why an authoritarian government like Venezuela might want to pursue transparency policies.

Some scholars theorize that autocracies adopt transparency measures to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.[61] Maerz refines this argument through a qualitative assessment of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. Her findings suggest that while some autocracies indeed adopt transparency measures primarily for an international audience (e.g. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), other autocracies are adopting these measures to gain internal legitimacy and increase political support (e.g. Russia and Kazakhstan).[62]

Other scholars argue that autocracies have moved toward greater fiscal transparency in the last decade as a strategy to increase foreign investment and development assistance.[63] Countries like China, Tunisia, Singapore, and Malaysia, for

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[60] James R. Hollyer, B. Peter Rosendorff, and James Raymond Vreeland, "Democracy and Transparency," *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 4 (2011): 1202.

[61] Jenny De Fine Licht, Daniel Naurin, Peter Esaiasson, Mikael Gilljam, "When does transparency generate legitimacy? Experimenting on a Context-Bound relationship," *Governance* 27, no. 1 (2014): 111-34; Joachim Åström, Martin Karlsson, Jonas Linde, and Ali Pirannejad, "Understanding the rise of e-participation in non-democracies: Domestic and international factors," *Government Information Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2012): 142-50.

[62] Seraphine F. Maerz, "The electronic face of authoritarianism: E-government as a tool for gaining legitimacy in competitive and non-competitive regimes," *Government Information Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (4): 733-734.

[63] Sheila Coronel, "*The right to know: Access-to-information in Southeast Asia*," Bangkok, Thailand: Raintree Publishing, Inc. (2011): 1-20; Jamie P. Horsely, "Rule of law: Guangzhou's pioneering foray into open government," *The China Business Review* 30 no. 4 (2003): 40−43;

example, have embraced fiscal transparency without adopting access to information laws or supporting a free press.[64] Unlike other types of transparency, fiscal transparency serves the interests of authoritarian regimes because it contributes to the creation of stable regulatory environments, which are attractive to international investors.[65]

Given that the open data movement seems to be gaining momentum in autocracies, several studies have looked at the relationship between transparency and accountability in non-democratic contexts. A study of environmental transparency measures in China finds that, given China's authoritarian structure, improved governance does not necessarily translate into stronger accountability.[66] Malesky, Schuler, and Tran reached a similar conclusion in a randomized controlled experiment that evaluated a transparency initiative in Vietnam. A randomly selected sample of delegates from the National Assembly of Vietnam had their transcripts and scorecards from the most recent legislative session posted on the web site of the country's most popular online newspaper, VietnamNet. The study found that the treated delegates were less likely to participate in the following legislative session than non-treated delegates.[67]

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64 Jeannine E. Relly and Meghna Sabharwal, "Perceptions of transparency of government policymaking: A cross-national study," *Government Information Quarterly* 26 no. 1 (2009): 151.

65 Sheila Coronel, "*The right to know: Access-to-information in Southeast Asia*," 1-20.

66 Yeling Tan, "Transparency without democracy: The unexpected effects of china's environmental disclosure policy: Transparency without democracy," *Governance* 27, no. 1 (2014): 37-62.

67 Edmund Malesky, Paul Schuler, and Anh Tran, "The adverse effects of sunshine: A field experiment on legislative transparency in an authoritarian assembly," *The American Political Science Review* 106, no. 4 (2012): 784.

Other studies have found that transparency can reduce citizens' trust in government when it reveals improper or illegal behavior by public officials.[68] This might be because when accountability is "soft" (i.e. when citizens lack reliable institutional avenues to hold public officials accountable), transparency may discourage rather than increase civic engagement.[69] Ferraz and Finan's 2008 study in Brazil, for example, found that public dissemination of corruption scandals in local governments had a negative effect on incumbents' electoral performance.[70]

These findings imply that in contexts where government corruption is pervasive and rule of law is weak, transparency reforms may not have the positive effects on trust, participation, and governance that it has in more democratic contexts. In addition, trust in government tends to goes down during economic crises[71], particularly among less educated and working class citizens who typically fair worse during economic downturns.[72] Trust in government is also low in countries with low institutional capacity[73] and high levels of political polarization[74] because people become disenchanted with the government's

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[68] Monika Bauhr and Marcia Grimes, "Indignation or resignation: The implications of transparency for societal accountability," *Governance* 27, no. 2 (2014): 309; Mark Bovens, "*The digital republic: Democracy and the rule of law in the information society*," Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (2003); Amitai Etzioni, "Is transparency the best disinfectant?" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2010): 389-404.

[69] Monika Bauhr and Marcia Grimes, "Indignation or resignation: The implications of transparency for societal accountability," 310.

[70] Claudio Ferraz and Frederico Finan, "Exposing corrupt politicians: The effects of brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123, no. 2 (2008): 703-45.

[71] Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph, "*Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*," 142.

[72] Chase Foster and Jeffry Frieden, "Crisis of trust: Socio-economic determinants of Europeans' confidence in government," 511-35.

[73] Marc L. Hutchison and Kristin Johnson, "Capacity to trust? Institutional capacity, conflict, and political trust in Africa, 2000-2005," 737-52.

[74] Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph, "*Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*," 47.

ineffectiveness. Therefore, I theorize that Venezuelan citizens might care less about government transparency because they have more pressing priorities, such as feeding themselves, or because they already have such low levels of trust in the government. In this vein, my third hypothesis is that the positive effect of transparency on approval ratings will be lower in Venezuela than in the United States.

Hypothesis 3: Greater transparency will generate less trust in government among Venezuelans than Americans

METHODOLOGY

I used both quantitative and qualitative methods to study government transparency in Venezuela. The qualitative component involved 22 semi-structured interviews in Caracas, Venezuela with public servants who provide government data and various stakeholders who require access to government data. The goal of these interviews was to assess the current state of government transparency in the country, as well as inform the design and theoretical framework of my experimental study. On the supply side, I was interested in learning what obstacles they face in providing data and what their rationale is for deciding what to provide and what not to provide. On the demand side, I conducted interviews with civil society organizations, journalists, academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and businesses. My goal was to learn about their experience attempting to access different types of government data (demographic, economic, financial, etc.).

In addition to qualitative work, I conducted a pilot survey experiment at the University of Texas at Austin. This, in turn, informed the design of my proposed survey experiment in Caracas, Venezuela. While the original intent of my thesis was to carry out the survey experiment in Venezuela, it was not possible to do so because of current political and economic instability. Although the results of the pilot experiment are not generalizable to the Venezuelan context, the findings informed the plausibility of the experimental method, as well as the feasibility and robustness of my study design. When time, funds, and political climate permits, I hope to actually implement the survey experiment in Venezuela.

KEY FINDINGS

My qualitative research showed that the path towards improving transparency may be through local governments. Through my interviews, as discussed in the next chapter, I learned that state and municipal governments tend to be more accessible than the central government. Yet, many local governments lack the resources and political will to implement transparency policies. This research is important because it highlights the obstacles that public servants face and provides evidence of a strong demand for government transparency among Venezuelan journalists, businesses, NGOs, academics, and researchers. However, in order to build political will among public servants, it is also necessary to generate concrete evidence of a strong demand for government transparency among regular citizens. This is what the experimental portion of my study hopes to achieve,

detailed in chapters three and four. While similar experimental studies have been done before, this study will fill a necessary gap in the literature about citizen demand for transparency in non-democratic developing countries with high levels of government corruption and data opacity.

Chapter 2: Interviews

In order to assess the current state of government transparency in Venezuela, I conducted semi-structured interviews with public servants who provide government data and various stakeholders who require access to government data. The interviews took place in Caracas, Venezuela, from June through mid-July 2016. The goal of these interviews was to assess the current state of government transparency in the country. On the supply side, I was interested in learning what obstacles public servants face in providing data and what their rationale is for either completing or denying requests for information by the public. On the demand side, I conducted interviews with journalists, academics, researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and businesses to learn about their experiences attempting to access different types of government data (demographic, economic, financial, etc.). I chose the semi-structured format to allow the dialogue to remain focused on the topic of my research, while still being open-ended enough for interview subjects to express themselves in a self-reflective manner.

In the month and a half that I spent in Venezuela, I conducted a total of 22 semi-structured interviews. Nineteen of these interviews were with stakeholders (i.e. journalists, academics, researchers, NGOs, and businesses), and the remaining three were with public

servants.[75] The interviews with stakeholders consisted of twelve scripted questions and lasted an average of forty-five minutes. The interviews with public servants, on the other hand, consisted of eighteen scripted questions and lasted an average of sixty minutes. The semi-structured format occasionally allowed for additional non-scripted follow-up questions.

Table 1: Interview Questions for Stakeholders

Interview Questions for Stakeholders
1. Do you require any data from the government? If so, what type of data do you require?
2. Is government data easily available and/or accessible?
3. Does availability and/or accessibility depend on the type of data (e.g., demographic, budget, financial, public contracts, etc.)?
4. Does availability and/or accessibility depend on the level of government (e.g. central, state, municipal, etc.)?
5. In what format is the data available (e.g., PDF, Excel, JPEG, etc.)?
6. Do you ever make formal requests for data from the government? If so, what type of data do you request?
7. From what level of government do you request data (e.g. central, state, municipal, etc.)?
8. How would you describe the level of freedom of press in Venezuela? Is there any room for improvement?
9. Are you aware of any freedom of information laws or commitments within your state/municipality?
10. What do you think of the state of government transparency in Venezuela? Is there any room for improvement?
11. What political party in Venezuela are you affiliated with?
12. Do you wish to remain anonymous?

[75] A limitation of this study is that I was unable to secure interviews with pro-government individuals. All but one of the interview subjects were affiliated with the opposition party. This outlier was a Marxist economist and researcher who did not identify himself as either a member of the opposition nor a "Chavista."

Table 2: Interview Questions for Public Servants

Interview Questions for Public Servants
1. How would you describe the level of political participation in your state/municipality (high, medium, or low)? 2. Are there any freedom of information laws or commitments in your state/municipality? 3. Do you receive data requests from citizens? If so, what type of data do citizens request (e.g., demographic, budget, financial, etc.)? 4. Do the requests originate from inside or outside your municipality/state? 5. How would you describe the degree of citizen demand for government data within your municipality/state (high, medium, or low)? 6. What is your criteria for deciding what type of data to provide and what not to provide? 7. What does the government data provision process entail? 8. Are there any obstacles that prevent you from providing data? If so, are there any obstacles in terms of funding, infrastructure, and/or resources (e.g., time, technology, training, etc.)? 9. How would you describe your experience with citizens who demand government data? Has it been positive, negative, or neutral? 10. Do you require any data from the central or state government? If so, what type of data do you require? 11. Is government data easily available and/or accessible? 12. Does availability and/or accessibility depend on the type of data (e.g., demographic, budget, financial, public contracts, etc.)? 13. Does availability and/or accessibility depend on the level of government (e.g. central, state, etc.)? 14. In what format is the data available (e.g., PDF, Excel, JPEG, etc.)? 15. Do you ever make formal requests for data from the central or state government? If so, what type of data do you request?

16. What do you think of the state of government transparency in Venezuela? Is there any room for improvement?
17. What political party in Venezuela do you affiliate with?
18. Do you wish to remain anonymous?

I used a variety of methods to find my interview subjects, some of which yielded better results than others. I first tried emailing people and organizations but that method had a very low success rate. I then obtained phone numbers from websites and started contacting organizations, newspapers, research centers, municipal governments, and government agencies in order to find willing interview subjects. That method had a higher success rate. I also utilized the "snowball" technique, which involved asking my interview subjects if they could refer me to other key informants who may have knowledge of the subject matter. I found this method to be the most effective way of finding interview subjects.

FINDINGS

The consensus among respondents interviewed for this study was that government transparency in Venezuela is essentially nonexistent at the national level. Neither the stakeholders nor the public officials I interviewed believed that central government data (e.g. inflation figures, epidemiological reports, crime rates, etc.) is publicly available or easily accessible. They reported that the current level of extreme opacity is a relatively recent development, beginning in 2013 when the inflation rate started to rise. As the economic crisis deepened, gaining access to government data became increasingly difficult. Since 2013, most interview subjects have stopped altogether trying to make any

type of government data requests (via email, official letters, or in person) because they often proved fruitless. Requests filed online or in paper were almost always ignored. When interview subjects made requests in person, they were told that the information was classified for national security purposes, even when requesting seemingly innocuous information on topics like health or education.

Stakeholders requesting data were also treated with suspicion and asked intrusive questions, such as why they wanted the data and what they were planning to do with it. One researcher I interviewed was fired from the Bolivarian University of Venezuela—a staunchly pro-government University founded by decree of President Hugo Chávez—because he criticized the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) for not publishing official inflation figures. When stakeholders were successful in obtaining data, it was because they either had the signature of the person in charge of the government body, they had connections inside the government, or they pretended to be students. However, some officials no longer give information to students because they have realized that it will often end up in the hands of academics or researchers.

Most stakeholders agreed that the degree of transparency varied according to the level of government. Municipalities were considered the most transparent and the central government was labeled the least transparent, with state governments placed somewhere in between. There is also a greater willingness among local government officials to implement transparency policies. While there is no national transparency law in Venezuela, five state governments have a transparency law and 14 municipal governments have

transparency ordinances[76]. However, the level of transparency within municipal governments is often tied to their political affiliation. State and municipal governments that are pro-government are more closed, whereas opposition ones tend to be more responsive to requests for data. As I learned from my interviews, the staff of pro-government officials are hesitant to provide public information due to fear of retaliation if the information is used to criticize the government. The staff of officials affiliated with the opposition, on the other hand, do not share this fear of retaliation and are therefore more willing to comply with citizen information requests.

The level of transparency also depends on the relationship between stakeholders and public officials. According to my interviews, municipal governments that have a history of working with NGOs and civil society organizations tend to give more information than those that lack such experience. Smaller municipalities are sometimes more accessible because it is easier to reach their staff. When small or rural municipalities fail to provide information, it is not necessarily because they do not want to - but because they often lack the money, time, technology, and qualified staff necessary to process data requests.

When the government does provide data, it is rarely given in a usable format like Excel or CSV. These formats are preferred by data users because they allow for easier extraction and analysis of data. Yet, most stakeholders reported finding government data primarily in PDF format, and are occasionally provided information in a Word document

[76] For reference, there are 23 states, 1 capital district, and 335 municipalities in Venezuela.

or physical paper. One journalist I interviewed attributed this trend to a lack of "data culture," asserting that officials "do not understand why PDF is not useful for us. They feel that it is enough to digitize the information." Sometime the PDFs are of scanned images, further impeding the extraction and analysis of the requested data. As a result, stakeholders waste a lot of time cleaning and transcribing data.

In addition, interviewees describe the quality of data provided by the government as being low in terms of timeliness, accuracy, and comparability. As the examples in the following sections will show, government data is often not kept up-to-date, is measured incorrectly, and does not meet international standards.

Journalists

"As journalists, the quality of our work depends on access to public information."

~ Mariengracia Chirinos, Director of Information Freedom at IPYS

The journalists I interviewed mostly required official health data (likely due to the high levels of Zika and Chikungunya at the time of my interviews), but also reported needing data on crime, education, government budgets, and the economy. However, interviewees reported that the government rarely provides official data on any of these topics. Journalists are frequently limited to unofficial and anonymous sources, and will often go to great lengths to find data. For example, in order to estimate the homicide rate in Caracas, journalists will visit the Bello Monte morgue (where all homicide victims in Caracas are taken) and ask the guard how many bodies have arrived, or even count the

bodies coming in themselves. A reporter for Runrunes, a Venezuelan news website, found maternity statistics by going to the Concepción Palacios Maternity Hospital in Caracas and getting a signature from the director. The director, distracted in the moment, signed the form without realizing the nature of the request.

Lacking the permission of a high level official is a common obstacle for citizens requesting data. Without the signature of the director of the government body, public servants will generally refuse requests for information - often fearing retaliation from higher ranking public officials. Calling the press department of different government bodies also tends to be an ineffective strategy. A journalist for the Venezuelan newspaper El Nacional spent a year calling the health minister to request an interview, but never received a response. The government frequently criticizes articles by journalists that do not use official government figures, even though the government refuses to provide data or agree to interviews.

Freedom of Press

Declining press freedom has made it increasingly difficult for journalists to operate independently and for stakeholders to access information. The 2004 Law on Social Responsibility of Radio and Television allows the government to punish media outlets for expressing dissent. The government has also punished opposition media outlets by withdrawing government advertising, imposing hefty fines, and controlling the sale of newsprint. Not only does the government have a monopoly on the sale of newsprint, they

also use their control over currency exchange to prevent critical media outlets from purchasing newsprint from abroad.

Constant financial pressure and harassment from the government has pushed at least 25 private media outlets to be bought by pro-government business groups, resulting in greater censorship and considerably more favorable coverage of the government. In April of 2013, just a few days after President Nicolás Maduro was elected, one of the most popular opposition television networks, Globovisión, was sold to businessmen allied with the government. Less than two weeks later, the new board of directors banned all broadcasts of Henrique Capriles' speeches, the biggest opposition leader and the presidential candidate that rivaled both Chávez and Maduro in the recent elections.[77] The following month, the new owners went on to fire prominent opposition journalists Ismael Garcia and Kico Bautista, cancelled the channel's most popular opinion show Aló, Ciudadano, established a list of guests that were prohibited from appearing on air, and required journalists to pose certain questions meant to bolster the government's image.[78] An employee of Datanalisis, a Venezuelan market research company, said that he was invited by Globovisión to talk about the widespread shortages of staple goods, but was expressly prohibited from using the term "scarcity."

In addition to censorship, there is also rampant violence against journalists. An NGO that monitors freedom of expression told me in an interview that journalists are

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[77] "Prominent journalists leave Venezuelan TV channel after ownership change," *BBC News*, July 4, 2013.

[78] Frank Bajak and Jorge Rueda, "Journalists jumping ship at Venezuela TV channel," *Associated Press*, August 22, 2013.

frequently detained, arrested, intimidated, physically attacked, as well as have their equipment confiscated. This is particularly the case for those seeking to shine a light on the current economic and healthcare crisis. Two journalists I interviewed from the Institute for Press and Society stated that they recorded at least 546 violations of press freedom in 2016, up from 287 in 2015. Due to the violence and harassment faced by opposition media outlets, the few remaining radio and television stations that are still independent have a adopted a policy of self-censorship. Social networks such as Twitter and Whatsapp have therefore become the primary means for Venezuelans to find out what is happening in their country.

Academics/Researchers

The academics and researchers I interviewed required specific data on the topic they were researching. This includes figures on homicides, school performance, domestic violence, child abandonment, economic production, employment, and other types of economic activity. However, the government data they need to complete their research is either unavailable or out of date. For example, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) has been conducting a national survey of households since 1967. Yet, as my interviewees explained, the necessary adjustments have not been made to the INE survey to allow researchers to investigate pressing topics, nor has the survey design been updated to meet international standards. INE also charges universities exorbitant rates in order to access their information, making much of the required data prohibitively expensive.

Academics and researchers reported facing other problems when attempting to access data. When information is available, it is usually not disaggregated by category, or formatted in a way that lends itself to analysis - making it very difficult to conduct econometric and correlational studies. Some ministries, state governments, and public agencies publish research reports but fail to provide access to the original data sources. Without primary data, it is difficult to analyze, replicate, or otherwise examine official statistics. When academics and researchers have a connection inside the government that gives them access to data, they often cannot cite the information because it is unofficial and therefore lacks credibility.

Due to these problems, academics and researchers are increasingly opting to produce their own data. Two social scientists I interviewed from the Andrés Bello Catholic University said that, in 2014, they started collaborating with scholars from the Central University of Venezuela and Simón Bolívar University to conduct a survey of living conditions. The goal of the Encuesta sobre Condiciones de Vida (ENCOVI) is to monitor socioeconomic conditions and attempt to measure the outcomes of government policies and social programs. The survey is carried out in large, medium, and small cities throughout the country, and covers topics such as poverty, violence, access to food, education, employment, health, public services, and vulnerability to natural disasters. The results of ENCOVI are used outside of academia as well. Several journalists and NGOs interviewed for this study mentioned relying on ENCOVI as one of their few sources of reliable data. While ENCOVI aims to fill an important data gap, universities do not have

the capacity or resources to collect detailed information at the national, regional, and local levels in the way that the government can.

NGOs

NGO employees reported a need for economic data (GDP, inflation, currency exchange, budgetary, etc.), as well as data on nutrition, food security, birth rates, mortality, public expenses, social programs, public policy, and demographics. The NGOs I interviewed use this data for a variety of purposes: monitoring freedom of expression, improving government transparency, protecting civil liberties, evaluating public policies and social programs, and alleviating poverty and food insecurity.

My interview with the director of Fundación Bengoa, a food security NGO, illustrates some of the problems that NGOs face due to lack of government responsiveness. Back in the 1990s, it was possible to request data from INE disaggregated by state. The National Institute of Nutrition (INN) even offered courses to learn how to use their database and food security indicators. However, INN has not published data since 2013 and the information that is available is largely inaccurate. Rather than using international child nutrition standards, the INN uses Venezuelan standards which are not up-to-date, use questionable methods, and are not subject to external evaluations. As a result, health data published by the government make child malnutrition rates appear much lower than they actually are.

Businesses

The businesses I interviewed mostly required economic data (e.g., currency exchange rate, devaluation of the bolivar, inflation, interest, and international reserves) for their market research. This information was previously accessible through the BCV's webpage. According to my interview subjects, the BCV previously operated one of the most comprehensive and user-friendly web portals in Latin America. Data was published in a regular and consistent manner (monthly or quarterly depending on the indicator), and was available as far back as 1950. However, in 2014 the BCV started publishing inflation data with delays, and in 2015 it stopped publishing data altogether. In recent years, BCV reports have become more politicized and primarily favor the government.

Not only has there been a loss of information, accessing the BCV data has become more complex, and its reliability has been undermined by problematic research and methodology. Respondents asserted that the BCV does not entirely fabricate inflation data, but rather, they manipulate the weights and indicators so that inflation seems artificially lower. An employee of Datanalisis reported that they frequently receive requests for estimates of inflation in Venezuela. However, as a private company they lack the capacity to replicate the methodology of the BCV. Private organizations will instead opt to use proxy indicators to estimate inflation, such as a survey of the food sector.

Public Officials

The public officials interviewed for this study included the Coordinator of Transparency for the Municipal Government of El Hatillo, the Director of the Municipal Government of Baruta, and a member of the Environmental Committee of the National Assembly. All three were critical of the government and highly committed to transparency. In fact, the municipal government of Baruta has been recognized by the Inter-American Development Bank for their commitment to innovation and public service. When David Smolansky was elected mayor of El Hatillo in 2013, he received funding from the British Embassy to create the first Transparency Office. He also enacted a transparency ordinance and signed a commitment with Transparency Venezuela. Therefore, the findings from these interviews should not be considered representative of the average public official in Venezuela.

Both municipal governments reported receiving and completing data requests from citizens, journalists, businesses, and NGOs. El Hatillo started publishing the balance of the municipal treasury when citizens demanded it. Residents have also requested progress reports of ongoing municipal projects, complete with status updates and goals met. In Baruta, most data requests originate from communal councils. However, both municipalities reported a moderate demand for data. The Transparency Office of El Hatillo receives an average of three data requests per month. The environmental committee, on the other hand, reports a higher demand for information. Unlike the environmental committee,

the municipal governments of Baruta and El Hatillo publish most of their data online, which might explain why they experience fewer information requests.

If residents of El Hatillo solicit something that is not on the website, the Transparency Office has five business days to provide it. After the request is fulfilled, the citizen is contacted by Transparency Venezuela to ask if they received the data on time and if the quality was satisfactory. These responses are then used to evaluate the responsiveness of El Hatillo's municipal government. Similarly, when the Government of Baruta receives a data request for something that is not available online, they aim to provide the information in less than 10 business days.

Each office employed different criteria to decide what data to provide and what not to provide. El Hatillo follows the requirements of their transparency ordinance as well as the standards set by Transparency Venezuela. They also examine what information other municipalities are publishing in order to outperform them[79]. Baruta tries to provide any information requested by citizens, but there is some data that is confidential. For example, certain information about taxes and businesses is not made available to the public in order to protect the privacy of citizens and business owners. Similarly, the environmental committee is prohibited from providing certain information for national security reasons. However, as the committee official explained to me, national security is often used as a pretense to hide information that can reflect poorly on the government. For example, the

[79] This is unique to El Hatillo, there is no a competitive environment in Venezuela when it comes to public management.

National Assembly is forbidden from providing mortality data or causes of death. Yet, the central government criticizes journalists when they use unofficial data to report on homicide.

I also asked public officials about their experience requesting data from the national government. El Hatillo and Baruta reported difficulty accessing economic data (inflation, credit, etc.) and information about legislative changes. The respondents asserted that this makes it difficult for them to accurately plan their budgets. For example, the central government dictates a certain number of mandatory salary increases each year, but fail to release that information in advance. This creates a deficit in municipal budgets and causes delays in the payment of salaries of municipal employees. Furthermore, the lack of inflation figures prevents municipal governments from accurately estimating their budgets for the following year. As a result, they end up with insufficient resources and reduced capacity to carry out public works.

The environmental committee also reported trouble accessing information from other branches of government. Through the process of interpellation, the National Assembly should be able to obtain information. Yet, in practice, the executive branch is limiting that process. When the environmental committee makes data requests on behalf of citizens, the requests are either ignored or rejected on the basis that they are "unconstitutional." At the time of my interviews, the National Assembly and its committees were facing budget shortages and extreme resource limitations, further inhibiting their ability to complete data requests filed by citizens. Respondents stated that

they had not been able to make photocopies since February 2016 due to lack of money to purchase toner or paper, and that obsolete computer equipment could not be replaced. Due to electricity and water shortages, all deputies and staff members of the National Assembly are not allowed to stay in the building past 3:00pm, often having to complete their work from home.

The public officials I interviewed identified other challenges they face when providing data to citizens: (1) lack of education and training of citizens, who demand data but do not always understand the processes of supplying data; (2) lack of qualified employees who can effectively meet data requests; and (3) limited budgets, which do not allow local governments to improve their computer systems and develop organizational capacity. Despite these obstacles, the public officials described their experiences with citizens who demand data as mostly positive. As the Coordinator of Transparency of El Hatillo explained, "when we give them the information they ask for, they thank us and want to participate more in government."

CONCLUSION

At the time of my interviews in 2016, there was an Access to Information law being debated in the National Assembly. Transparency Venezuela has spent years advocating for a law that guarantees all citizens transparency and access to government data. The opposition-held National Assembly, elected in December 2015, was known for being more open and giving greater access to information. However, any progress made towards

passing this law stalled in 2017, when the Supreme Court dissolved the National Assembly and instituted a new Constituent Assembly with a pro-government majority.

NGOs, journalists, academics, civil society organizations, and even government officials have been affected by restrictions on data and are demanding higher levels of government transparency in Venezuela. However, it is also necessary to generate concrete evidence of the same demand among citizens. The following chapter will present the design and results of a pilot experiment testing the general hypothesis that providing constituents with information about a candidate's transparency accomplishments increases the approval rating of said candidate. The closing chapter will provide a research proposal to test the more specific hypothesis regarding transparency and public trust in the case of Venezuela.

Chapter 3: Pilot Experiment

Neuman and Calland argue that the biggest challenge to implementing successful transparency laws is a lack of political will on the supply side of transparency (i.e. the government).[80] Not only is the implementation of these laws costly, but there is often a perceived lack of citizen demand for transparency that further erodes the political will to carry out transparency initiatives. To facilitate the successful implementation of freedom of information laws, it is necessary to build political will by presenting concrete evidence that citizen demand exists. This study aims to find whether there is a demand for government transparency among citizens by testing the hypothesis that reporting on a candidate's transparency accomplishments increases their approval rating. I theorize that a public official who makes additional efforts to be transparent (on top of what is already required by law) will be perceived as less corrupt and more trustworthy by their constituents, and therefore receive higher approval ratings from citizens.

[80] Neuman, Laura and Richard Calland, "Making the Access to Information Law Work: The Challenges of Implementation," 10, 2-3.

While the original intent of my thesis was to carry out this survey experiment in Venezuela, it was not possible due to the current economic crisis and volatile political climate. This chapter describes a pilot experiment I conducted at the University of Texas at Austin with the intention of informing the design of my proposed survey experiment in Caracas, Venezuela.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Sampling

Due to the short time frame and lack of resources available to design and carry out this study, the subject pool for this pilot experiment was selected using convenience sampling. In the fall 2016 semester, I enrolled in an experimental methods graduate course offered by the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. The main requirement for that course was designing and carrying out an experiment. Through that course, I gained access to a sample of 1,300 undergraduate students enrolled in an online government class (GOV 312L). I chose to use this sample because I did not have sufficient funds to pay a survey firm or to find survey respondents through a paid service like Amazon Mechanical Turk.

Out of a maximum possible sample size of 1,300 undergraduate students, I obtained 869 survey responses. To compare treatment effects across groups and check for possible interactions between the treatment and covariates, I asked the subjects to provide demographic information. The majority of the students in the sample identified themselves as white, male, under 20 years old, liberal, Democrat, somewhat religious, Protestant

Christian, and reported having a household income of over $120,000 a year. Table 3 shows the percentages corresponding to these sample characteristics. For more detailed descriptive statistics of the sample, please refer to Appendix A.

Table 3: Sample Distribution

How is the sample distributed?
N = 869
53.44 percent Men
49.76 percent White
48.24 percent Less than 20 years old
47.42 percent Democrat
28.19 percent Liberal
36.87 percent Somewhat religious
31.28 percent Protestant Christian
41.76 percent Over $120,000

Because my subjects are college students and I used convenience sampling, as opposed to random sampling, my sample may not be representative of the entire population of eligible American voters. This threatens the external validity of my findings. However, there is evidence that student subjects do not necessarily pose a threat to the external validity of a study. Druckman and Kam argue that student samples do not reduce experimental realism, nor do they differ significantly from non-student samples for a host of variables relevant to political science studies (e.g. partisanship, ideology, important of

religion, social trust, etc.).[81] What's more, the 2014 United States Census shows that the majority of eligible American voters are male (47.9 percent), white (69.9 percent), between 45 and 64 years old (35 percent), from the southern region of the United States (37.4 percent), have some years of college education or associate degree (30 percent), and earn a household income ranging from $50,000 to $74,000 a year (16.1 percent).[82] Apart from age and income, the sample distribution for this experiment (see Table 3) is fairly similar to the overall population of eligible American voters.

Assignment to Treatment and Control

Participants answered five questions on an online survey administered via Qualtrics. The Qualtrics software randomly assigned subjects to the treatment and control groups, following a protocol of complete random assignment. The purpose of doing complete random assignment was to ensure a balanced number of subjects between treatment and control groups. However, there ended up being slightly more subjects in the control groups than in the treatment groups. Table 4 shows the number of respondents in each group.

Table 4: Treatment and Control Groups

Treatment Group #1: 219 respondents	Control Group #1: 223 respondents
Treatment Group #2: 209 respondents	Control Group #2: 218 respondents

[81] James N. Druckman and Cindy D. Kam, "Students as experimental participants: A defense of the 'narrow data base'," *Institute for Policy Research* (2009): 21, 24.

[82] Thom File, "Who Votes? Congressional Elections and the American Electorate: 1978-2014," *United States Census Bureau*, (2015), Accessed at www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p20-577.pdf

Treatment and Control Groups

The students were divided into two treatment groups and two control groups. All participants read one candidate profile. The candidate was either a Democrat or a Republican (see below for more details). Each profile contained a brief list summarizing the candidate's accomplishments and stances on various issues. The subjects were asked to rate on a scale of one to five how much they approved of the candidate. To read the candidate profiles and survey questions, please see Appendix B. Below is a list of the two treatment groups and the two control groups.

- Treatment Group #1: The Democratic candidate's profile contains an additional accomplishment that is related to government transparency.
- Treatment Group #2: The Republican candidate's profile contains an additional accomplishment that is related to government transparency.
- Control Group #1: The Democratic candidate's profile does not contain an accomplishment that is related to government transparency.
- Control Group #2: The Republican candidate's profile does not contain an accomplishment that is related to government transparency.

I chose to add a transparency accomplishment rather than substitute one of the accomplishments because removing an item from the list could potentially affect approval ratings. I also chose to include both political parties to account for political bias among the subjects. Had I chosen only one candidate from a particular political party and the majority of the subjects were affiliated with one political party, their bias for or against the candidate could have obscured the transparency treatment effect. By including both a Democrat and

a Republican candidate, I can observe attitudinal differences across party lines with regards to government transparency. In addition, I chose to conduct a Republican versus Democrat analysis because it closely mirrors how I would structure the experiment in Venezuela. Although Venezuela has many political parties, most of them align with either the government or the opposition.

Candidate Selection

I selected two actual candidates, one Democrat and one Republican, from the population of United States senators currently in office. I chose Democratic Senator Bill Nelson and Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski because they are both fairly moderate members of their respective parties. To avoid biasing the survey responses, I did not include any personal information about the candidates that could be used to identify them (e.g. name, age, gender, political party, etc.).

I then selected five pieces of information pertaining to each candidate from a list of their accomplishments and stances on various issues. I tried to make their candidate profiles as moderate as possible by excluding extremist positions and hot-button issues like abortion and gun control. By choosing moderate candidates, accomplishments, and excluding polarizing issues, the set of outcomes is more likely to approximate a normal distribution. This will, in turn, make average treatment effects of knowledge about candidate transparency accomplishments easier to detect.

Outcome Variables and Covariates

The main outcome variable in this experiment is the subjects' expressed level of approval or disapproval for each candidate. I measured approval ratings using the following five-point Likert scale:

1: Strongly disapprove
2: Somewhat disapprove
3: Indifferent
4: Somewhat approve
5: Strongly approve

In order to capture why the subjects approve or disapprove of the candidates, I also measured the subjects' perceptions of the candidates. I did so by asking them to rate on a scale of one to five how much the following attributes describe the candidates: moral, honest, trustworthy, and "cares about people like you." I measured perceptions of the candidates using the following five-point Likert scale:

1: Not well
2: Slightly well
3: Moderately well
4: Very well
5: Extremely well

To compare treatment effects across groups and check for possible interactions between the treatment and covariates, I asked the subjects to provide various types of demographic information such as gender identity, racial/ethnic background, religious preference, political affiliation, ideology, and so on. I asked for this information at the end of the survey to avoid priming the subjects and thereby biasing their responses.

Hypothesis Testing

I displayed the distribution of outcomes using a histogram and a fitted distribution curve. The central peak and standard deviation of each distribution curve provided the average outcomes and standard deviations for the treatment and control groups. I computed the average treatment effect by calculating the difference between the central peaks of the distribution curves (i.e. by conducting a difference-in-means test). I employed a two tailed t-test with unequal variances to determine if the difference between means was statistically significant at the 99, 95, and 90 percent confidence levels. I chose a two-tailed test because I did not know with certainty whether the average treatment effect would be positive or negative. I rejected the null hypothesis if the difference of means was statistically significant at the 99, 95, and 90 percent confidence levels. I tested the following hypotheses:

- H_0: The transparency treatment will have no effect on approval ratings.
- H_1: The transparency treatment will have a positive effect on approval ratings.
- H_2: The transparency treatment will have a negative effect on approval ratings.

Data Collection

The survey was administered over the course of one week, from November 14th until November 20th. To increase the response rate, students received class extra credit for completing the survey. The link to the online survey was posted on Canvas, the platform through which students participate in the online course. As participants clicked on the link, the Qualtrics software randomly assigned subjects to the treatment and control groups. For

practical reasons, the survey was combined with four other survey experiments. Although my survey experiment was only five questions long, the integrated survey was much longer. Therefore, it took the students between 15 and 20 minutes to complete the five combined surveys. For my section of the survey, see Appendix B.

DATA ANALYSIS

Dependent Variable Distribution

Approval ratings for the Democratic candidate were high, whereas approval ratings for the Republican candidate were low. This is probably explained by the fact that most of the survey respondents identified as Democrats (47.42 percent), whereas a minority identified as Republicans (23.77 percent). To display the distribution of outcomes for the main dependent variable (approval), I computed four histograms with fitted distribution curves.

Figure 1: Democratic Candidate Approval Ratings

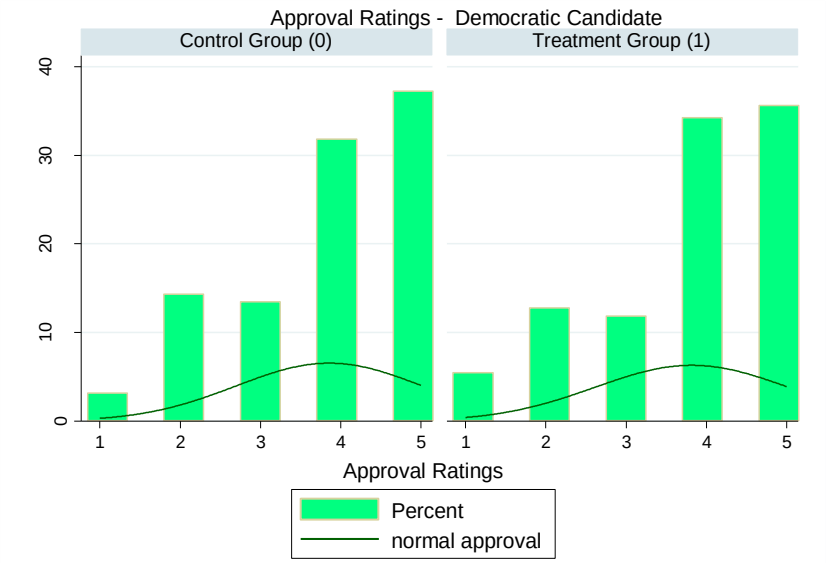
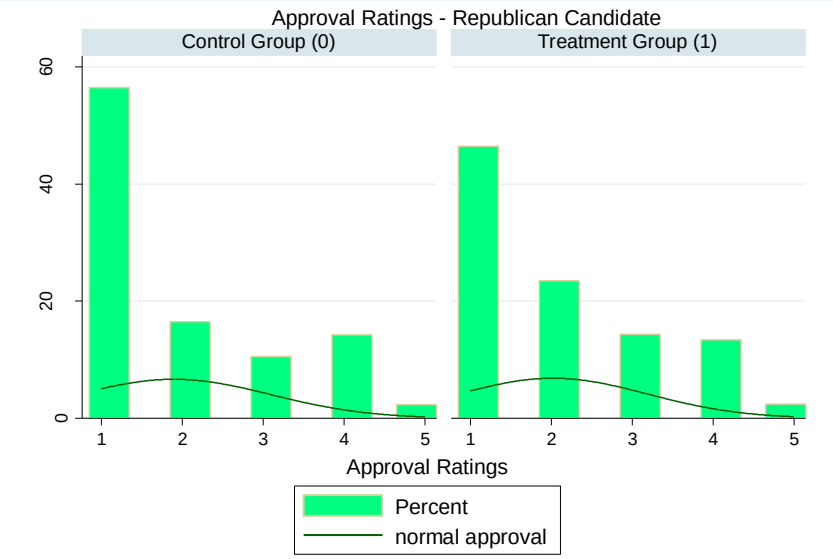


Figure 2: Republican Candidate Approval Ratings



Democratic Candidate Analysis

Contrary to H_1, the mean approval rating for the Democratic candidate was higher in the control group than in the treatment group. The same is true for the other outcome variables, with the exception of honest. To view summary statistics for all five outcome variables, please refer to Appendix C. Because the outcome variables had unequal standard deviations across treatment and control groups, I conducted a t-test with unequal variances for all five outcome variables (approval, moral, honest, trustworthy, and cares). Table 5 shows that the differences in means for all five outcome variables are not significant at a 95 percent confidence level because the p-values are higher than 0.05. These differences are also not significant at 90 percent and 99 percent confidence levels because the p-values are higher than 0.1 and 0.01, respectively. These results indicate that subjects who read the Democratic candidate profile and received the transparency treatment expressed lower approval ratings for the candidate than subjects in the control group. They also perceived the candidate as being less moral, less trustworthy, and less caring about people like them.

Table 5: Democratic Candidate T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	3.856502	3.817352	0.3477	0.6359	0.7283	0.3641
Moral	3.58296	3.534247	0.5036	0.6926	0.6148	0.3074
Honest	3.336323	3.347032	-0.1172	0.4534	0.9067	0.5466
Trustworthy	3.255605	3.187215	0.7268	0.7661	0.4677	0.2339
Cares	3.29148	3.255708	0.3107	0.6219	0.7561	0.3781

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Due to these unexpected results, I decided to conduct a subgroup analysis for various subgroups within the sample. Focusing on the Democratic subjects yielded similar

results. The mean approval rating was higher in the control group, as well as the mean perception of the candidate as moral, honest, trustworthy, and caring. These results show that Democratic subjects who received the transparency treatment expressed lower approval ratings for the Democratic candidate and perceived said candidate to be less moral, honest, trustworthy, and caring. Although the differences in means for honest, trustworthy, and cares were not significant, the difference in means for approval was significant at a 99 percent confidence level for both the two-tailed t-test and the one-tailed t-test in the positive direction. The difference in means for moral was also significant at a 95 percent confidence level for the one-tailed t-test in the positive direction and at a 90 percent confidence level for the two-tailed t-test. Despite these significant results, the direction of the differences are contrary to what I hypothesized in H_1 (positive effect). Instead, they fall more in line with H_2 (negative effect).

Table 6: Democratic Candidate and Democratic Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	**Control Group Mean**	**Treatment Group Mean**	**t-value**	**p-value (one tailed, negative)**	**p-value (two tailed)**	**p-value (one tailed, positive)**
Approval	4.455446	4.06383	2.7039	0.9962	0.0076***	0.0038***
Moral	3.920792	3.670213	1.8623	0.9679	0.0642*	0.0321**
Honest	3.693069	3.5	1.5034	0.9328	0.1345	0.0672*
Trustworthy	3.633663	3.446809	1.4017	0.9186	0.1627	0.0814*
Cares	3.871287	3.617021	1.6337	0.9480	0.1040	0.0520*

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

A subgroup analysis with only the Republican subjects yielded more encouraging results. The mean approval rating was higher in the treatment group, as well as the mean perception of the candidate as moral, honest, and caring about people like the subjects. This suggests that Republican subjects who received the transparency treatment expressed

higher approval ratings for the Democratic candidate and perceived said candidate to be more moral, honest, and caring. However, the differences in means for all five outcome variables are not significant at the 90, 95, or 99 percent confidence levels.

Table 7: Democratic Candidate and Republican Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	2.947368	3.105263	-0.7758	0.2198	0.4395	0.7802
Moral	3	3.157895	-0.8851	0.1890	0.3780	0.8110
Honest	2.824561	2.982456	-0.9141	0.1813	0.3626	0.8187
Trustworthy	2.807018	2.754386	0.3180	0.6245	0.7511	0.3755
Cares	2.473684	2.578947	-0.5136	0.3043	0.6086	0.6957

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

In addition to political party, I conducted subgroup analyses with gender, ideology, race, religious, and religion. The mean approval rating was higher in the treatment group among moderates, conservatives, whites, religious people, and Catholics. It was higher in the control group among men, women, liberals, slightly liberal people, slightly conservative people, Asians, Hispanics, the non-religious, Protestants, and agnostics. However, the differences in means were not significant at the 90, 95, or 99 percent confidence levels for nearly all combinations of outcome variables and subgroups. The only exceptions were liberals (approval**, trustworthy*, and cares**), whites (cares*), Asians (approval*), Hispanics (moral**), non-religious (moral*), Protestant (cares*), and Catholics (moral*).

Republican Candidate Analysis

For the Republican candidate, on the other hand, the results were in line with H_1 (positive effect). As predicted, the mean approval rating was higher in the treatment group,

as well as the mean perception of the candidate as moral and caring. This suggests that subjects who read the Republican candidate profile and received the transparency treatment expressed higher approval ratings for the Republican candidate than subjects in the control group. They also perceived the candidate to be more moral and caring about people like them. However, the differences in means for all five outcome variables are not significant at the 90, 95, or 99 percent confidence levels because the p-values are higher than 0.1, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 8: Republican Candidate T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	1.894495	2.019139	-1.0874	0.1387	0.2775	0.8613
Moral	1.807339	1.866029	-0.5952	0.2760	0.5520	0.7240
Honest	2.688073	2.645933	0.4187	0.6622	0.6757	0.3378
Trustworthy	2.169725	2.148325	0.2057	0.5814	0.8371	0.4186
Cares	1.802752	1.875598	-0.6733	0.2506	0.5011	0.7494

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

In this case, however, the subgroup analyses yielded statistically significant results. Among Democratic subjects, the means are higher in the treatment group for approval ratings, moral, trustworthy, and cares. In other words, Democratic subjects who received the transparency treatment expressed higher approval ratings for the Republican candidate and perceived said candidate to be more moral, trustworthy, and caring about people like them. However, only the difference in means for approval is statistically significant at a 90 percent confidence level for the one-tailed t-test in the negative direction. The differences in means for the other outcome variables are not significant.

Table 9: Republican Candidate and Democratic Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	1.418182	1.59	-1.4938	0.0684*	0.1368	0.9316
Moral	1.481818	1.54	-0.5379	0.2956	0.5913	0.7044
Honest	2.490909	2.33	1.1854	0.8814	0.2372	0.1186
Trustworthy	1.836364	1.85	-0.1064	0.4577	0.9153	0.5423
Cares	1.390909	1.54	-1.2388	0.1084	0.2169	0.8916

* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

Among Republican subjects, the means are also higher in the treatment group for approval ratings, moral, honest, and cares. This suggests that Republican subjects who received the transparency treatment expressed higher approval ratings for the Republican candidate and perceived said candidate to be more moral, honest, and caring about people like them. However, only the difference in means for approval ratings is statistically significant at a 90 percent confidence level for the two-tailed t-test and 95 percent confidence level for the one-tailed t-test in the negative direction. The differences in means for the other outcome variables are not significant.

Table 10: Republican Candidate and Republican Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	3.061224	3.475	-1.6717	0.0491**	0.0982*	0.9509
Moral	2.612245	2.7	-0.3782	0.3531	0.7062	0.6469
Honest	3.22449	3.25	-0.1174	0.4534	0.9068	0.5466
Trustworthy	3.102041	3.025	0.3590	0.6397	0.7206	0.3603
Cares	2.816327	2.85	-0.1251	0.4504	0.9008	0.5496

* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

Additional subgroup analyses show that the mean approval rating was higher in the treatment group among women, moderates, liberals, slightly liberal and slightly conservative people, Whites, Asians, Hispanics, non-religious folks, Catholics, and

Agnostics. However, the differences in means are only significant for a few combinations of outcome variables and subgroups: women (approval** and cares*), slightly conservative people (honest** and trustworthy*), liberals and slightly liberal people (cares*), moderates (honest* and approval**), and Catholics (approval*).

Interaction Tests

After testing the hypotheses, I conducted chi-squared tests to check for possible interactions between the treatment and covariates. I found statistically significant interactions between: (1) moral and household income; (2) trustworthy and Muslim; and (3) between cares and female, liberal, and Democrat. To control for this specific list of covariates, I ran three regressions which served to establish a basis of comparison:

$$moral = constant + treatorcontrol^{83} + household\ income + error$$

$$trustworthy = constant + treatorcontrol + muslim + error$$

$$cares = constant + treatorcontrol + gender + ideology + democrat + error$$

Table 11: Interaction Tests

	(1) moral	(2) trustworthy	(3) cares
treatorcontrol	0.00410	-0.0219	0.0194
	(0.04)	(-0.27)	(0.20)
hincome	0.00211		
	(0.09)		
muslim		-0.315	
		(-1.39)	
gender			-0.0739

[83] The "treatorcontrol" variable indicates whether the subject was assigned to treatment (1) or control (0).

			(-0.76)
ideology_int			0.0418
			(0.87)
democrat			0.0683
			(0.56)
_cons	2.687***	2.697***	2.455***
	(20.40)	(46.80)	(13.60)
N	843	796	838

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

I then generated interaction variables to measure the effect of the treatment on each covariate. For example, the interaction between treatment status and gender shows the effect of treatment when subjects are female (coded as 0) or male (coded as 1). After running additional regressions in which I controlled for the interaction variables, I found only the interaction between treatment status and Muslim to be statistically significant. It is important to note that only 3.39 percent of the subjects identified as Muslim, so the impact of this covariate is likely to be minimal.

Table 12: Regressions to Control for Specific Covariates

	(1) moral	(2) trustworthy	(3) cares	(4) moral	**(5)** trustworthy
treatorcontrol	0.00410	-0.0219	0.0194	0.255	0.0115
	(0.04)	(-0.27)	(0.20)	(1.03)	(0.14)
Hincome	0.00211			0.0244	
	(0.09)			(0.81)	
muslim		-0.315			0.236
		(-1.39)			(0.70)
gender			-0.0739		
			(-0.76)		
ideology_int			0.0418		
			(0.87)		

democrat			0.0683		
			(0.56)		
treathincome				-0.0486	
				(-1.09)	
treatmuslim					-0.995*
					(-2.19)
treatgender					
treatideology_int					
treatdemocrat					
_cons	2.687***	2.697***	2.455***	2.572***	2.681***
	(20.40)	(46.80)	(13.60)	(15.21)	(46.25)
N	843	796	838	843	796

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Because these interaction terms are the result of a multiplication between treatment status and each covariate, they are better interpreted in relation to treatment status and their respective covariate. As you can see from the interaction plots below, treated Muslims are less likely to perceive the candidate as trustworthy, treated democrats and liberals are less likely to perceive the candidate as caring, and treated women are more likely to perceive the candidate as caring.

Figure 3: Interaction Plot between Muslim and Trustworthy

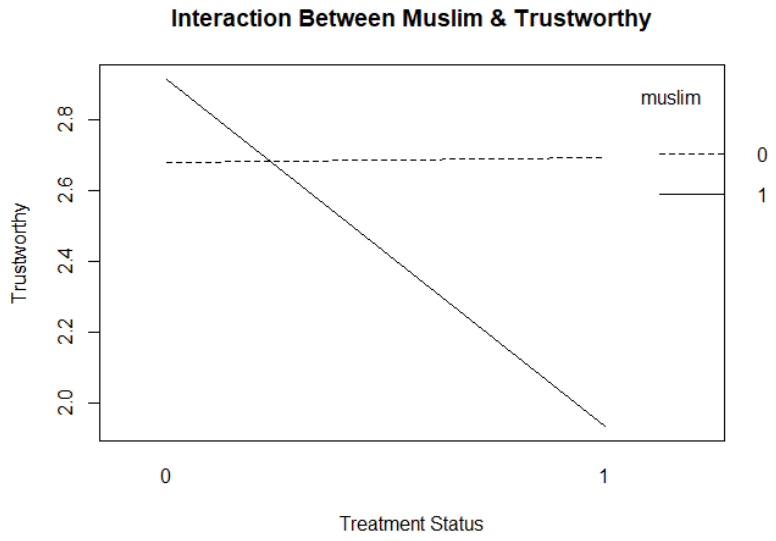


Figure 4: Interaction Plot between Gender and Cares

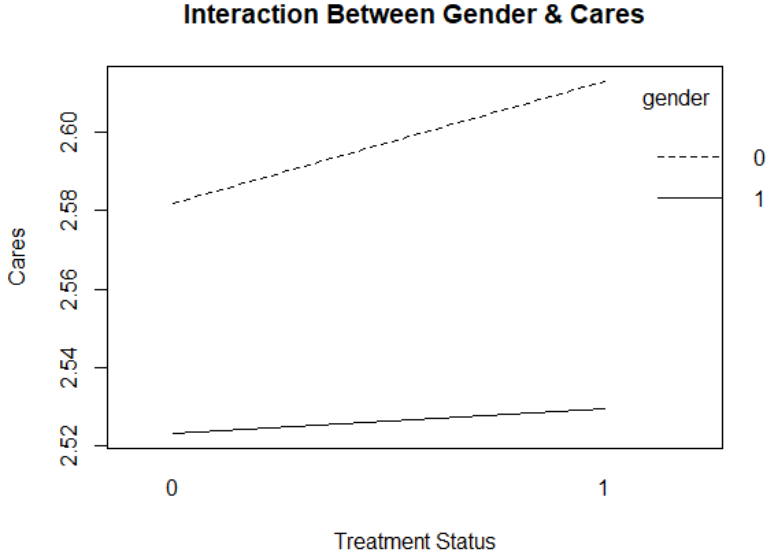


Figure 5: Interaction Plot between Democrat and Cares

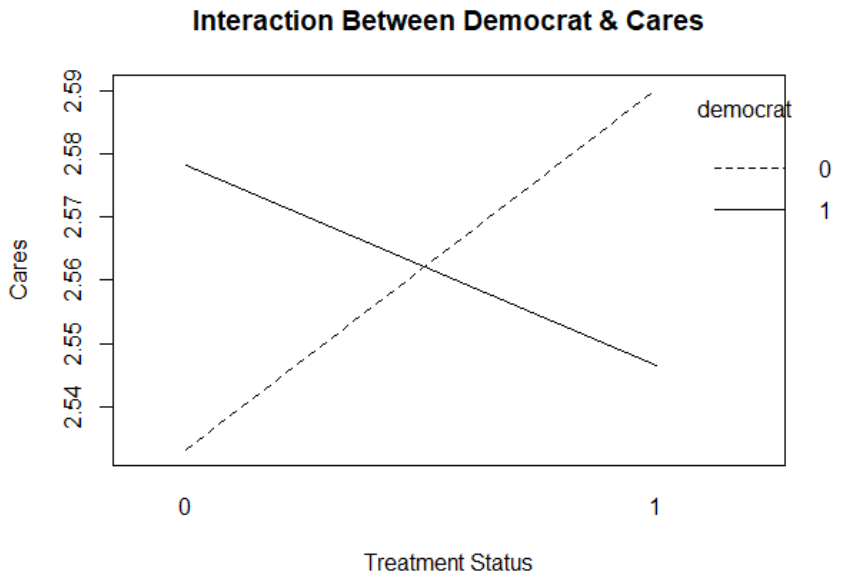
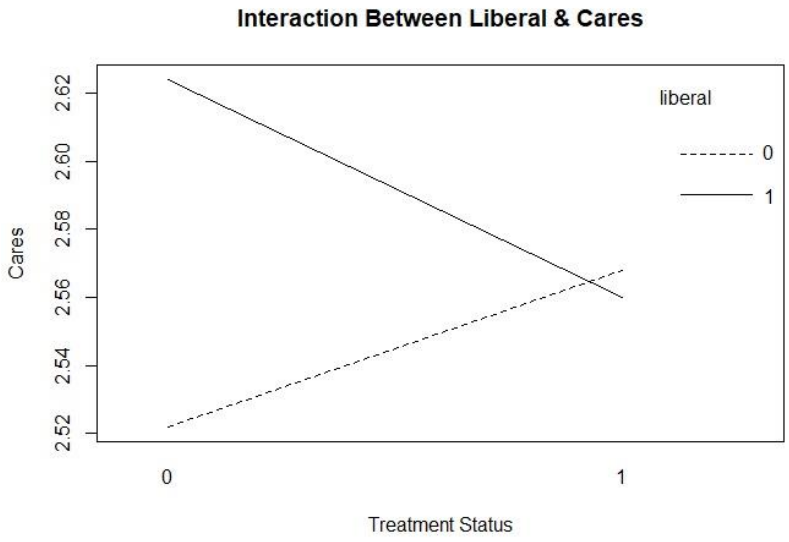


Figure 6: Interaction Plot between Liberal and Cares



Democrat versus Republican Analysis

Lastly, I conducted two t-tests with unequal variances to compare the two treatment groups and the two control groups. The mean approval rating was higher in the treatment group with the Democratic candidate (3.81), whereas the treatment group with the Republican candidate obtained a much lower mean approval rating (2.01). The mean perception of the candidate as moral, honest, trustworthy, and caring about people like the subjects is also higher for the Democratic candidate. These results show that subjects in treatment group #1 (Democratic candidate) expressed higher approval ratings than subjects in treatment group #2 (Republican candidate). Subjects in treatment group #1 also perceived their candidate to be more moral, honest, trustworthy, and caring about people like them than subjects in treatment group #2. The differences in means for all five outcome variables are significant at the 90, 95, and 99 percent confidence levels for the one-tailed t-test in the negative direction and the two-tailed t-test, but not for the one-tailed t-test in the positive direction. The difference in means test between the two control groups yielded essentially the same results.

Table 13: Democratic v. Republican Candidate (Treatment Groups)

Outcome Variable	Republican Mean	Democratic Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	2.019139	3.817352	-15.6724	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Moral	1.866029	3.534247	-16.6587	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Honest	2.645933	3.347032	-7.2682	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Trustworthy	2.148325	3.187215	-10.2448	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Cares	1.875598	3.255708	-12.7490	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000

Table 14: Democratic v. Republican Candidate (Treatment Groups)

Outcome Variable	Republican Mean	Democratic Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval	1.894495	3.856502	-17.4407	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Moral	1.807339	3.58296	-18.6621	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Honest	2.688073	3.336323	-6.7683	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Trustworthy	2.169725	3.255605	-11.2043	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000
Cares	1.802752	3.29148	-12.9384	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000

The approval ratings and perceptions of the candidate as moral, honest, trustworthy, and caring were probably skewed in favor of the Democratic candidate because the majority of survey respondents reported being politically affiliated with the Democratic Party (47.42 percent), whereas 23.77 percent identified with the Republican Party. What's more, a minority of survey respondents reported being ideologically conservative (9.36 percent) and slightly conservative (12.75 percent), whereas the majority identified as ideologically liberal (28.18 percent), slightly liberal (25.15 percent), and moderate (24.56 percent).

LIMITATIONS

The fact that I chose the candidates and prepared the candidate profiles, as well as the survey questions, poses a problem. No matter how hard I tried to make the range of political attitudes as moderate as possible, my own political opinions might have biased the survey design. Additionally, the candidate profiles in the treatment groups are slightly longer than the ones in the control group because they list an additional accomplishment related to transparency. Therefore, there is a possibility that approval ratings are higher for a candidate with more accomplishments. As mentioned in the data analysis, however,

subjects in control group #1 (Democratic candidate) expressed higher approval ratings than subjects in treatment group #1 (Democratic candidate). This might be due to an insufficiently strong treatment or because the subject's political biases for or against the Democratic candidate clouded the treatment effect.

Attrition is yet another possible limitation. If participants drop out of the experiment in a non-random way, the treatment group would no longer constitute a random sample and the average treatment effect could no longer be estimated without bias. In order to minimize the risk of attrition and increase the response rate, students received class extra credit for completing the survey. To increase the need for extra credit, the survey was strategically scheduled to be launched after the students turned in their midterm paper. Despite our efforts, 71 subjects started the survey and never finished. However, only 13 of these subjects made it to my portion of the survey questions, leaving 58 subjects who did not answer any of my survey questions. I decided to drop these 58 subjects from the analysis because the rows for these respondents were left blank and Qualtrics does not indicate whether they were assigned to treatment or control. Without this information, I was not able to do any type of analysis to control for those 58 subjects.

Non-compliance might have also been an issue if students who just wanted the extra credit filled out the survey without adequately considering the questions. This would be a case of failure-to-treat, in which subjects who are supposed to receive treatment go untreated. To detect non-compliance, we decided to include a screener question to make sure that the students were paying attention and reading the survey questions carefully. To

view the screener question, please refer to the end of Appendix B. The screener question asked the students to show that they were paying attention by disregarding the decoy question and selecting two specific answers (both of which were the wrong answers to the decoy question that they were asked to ignore). Passing the screener question is a good indicator that the students received the treatment, whereas failing the screener questions is a good indicator of non-compliance or failure-to-treat. We found that 52.25 percent of the survey respondents passed the screener question, which means that slightly more than half the sample was paying attention and reading the survey questions carefully.

Because close to 50 percent of the survey respondents failed the screener question, I decided to address non-compliance in the analysis. I first conducted a linear regression between the main outcome variable (approval) and the variable indicating whether the subject was assigned to treatment or control (treatorcontrol). This linear regression yielded insignificant results. I then conducted a two stage least squares regression, compared the results of both regressions, and found that the results were still insignificant after controlling for subjects who failed the screener question. I repeated these steps for each outcome variable (moral, honest, trustworthy, and cares) and found the same insignificant results. This was the case for both the Democratic and the Republican candidate.

Interference is another problem to consider, especially since the survey was not administered during class time. Instead, the students were able to access the link to the survey via Canvas and take it from wherever they were, whether they were at home, on campus, or another location. In order to minimize spillover effects, the link to the survey

was individualized so that students were not able to share the link with others. However, there is a chance that some students took the survey together. If one was assigned to control and the other to treatment, or if they were assigned to different treatments, there could have been interference. Students could have also talked about the survey with other students who had already taken it and influenced their answers, or they could have asked someone else to complete the survey on their behalf.

Another issue with the design is in how I measured the subjects' perceptions of the candidates. I did so by asking them to rate on a scale of one to five how much the following attributes describe the candidates: moral, honest, trustworthy, and "cares about people like you." Seventeen subjects complained that they were not given enough information to judge the candidate's morality, honesty, trustworthiness, and level of caring. However, this amounts to less than 1 percent of survey respondents.

Lastly, I was not able to perform block random assignment because we were unable to obtain demographic data for the sample prior to the experiment. To avoid priming the subjects and thereby biasing their responses, I asked for demographic information (e.g. gender identity, racial/ethnic background, religious preference, political affiliation, ideology, etc.) at the end of the survey. The problem with not doing randomization within blocks is that complete randomization can result in imbalances on covariates purely by chance. For this reason, I conducted randomization checks to make sure that the groups were balanced in terms of race, gender, religion, political party, ideology, etc. I found all of the randomization checks to be acceptable except for Jewish subjects and participants

who served in the military. However, only 1.75 percent of the survey respondents served in the military and 3.39 percent are Jewish. With such few subjects in each group, it is not hard for them to get out of balance and this unbalance could be simply due to random chance.

CONCLUSION

I failed to reject the null hypothesis for both candidates because the effect on approval ratings was not significant at the 90 percent, 95 percent, and 99 percent confidence levels. Not only were there no statistically significant effects, but in the case of the Democratic candidate the mean approval rating was actually higher in the control group. This was still the case after doing subgroup analyses, in which I narrowed down the t-tests based on the subject's political affiliation (either Democrat or Republican). Doing subgroup analyses did yield statistically significant effects, but in the negative direction. Therefore, I also failed to reject H_2 because the negative effect on approval ratings was statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level among Democratic subjects who read the Democratic candidate profile.

That being said, I also failed to reject H_1 because the positive effect on approval ratings was statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level among Democratic subjects who read the Republican candidate profile, and at the 95 percent confidence level among Republican subjects who read the Republican candidate profile. In sum, the results of this experiment suggest that Democratic candidates that make additional efforts to be

more transparent can expect lower approval ratings among Democrats and higher approval ratings among Republicans, whereas Republican candidates that make equal efforts to be more transparent can expect higher approval ratings from both Democrats and Republicans.

It is difficult to explain this finding because previous research about partisanship and demand for transparency in the United States has produced mixed results. A study by Piotrowski and Van Ryzin found that conservatives are more likely to question the need for government transparency, whereas liberals are more likely to believe in access to information as a civil right and as an essential element of good governance.[84] While liberals might report a stronger belief in transparency, this belief is not reflected in practice. Research by Armstrong found that counties with a higher proportion of Republicans exhibit higher levels of transparency[85], and a study by McNeal et al. found that states with Republican governors tend to offer more e-government services.[86] Further research by McNeal et al., however, indicates that higher government transparency might be better explained by the states' level of urbanization, wealth, and institutional capacity, than by demographic factors such as political affiliation.[87]

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[84]Suzanne J. Piotrowski and Gregg G. Van Ryzin, "Citizen attitudes toward transparency in local government," *The American Review of Public Administration* 37, no. 3 (2007): 320.

[85] Cory L. Armstrong, "Providing a clearer view: An examination of transparency on local government websites," *Government Information Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2011): 11-6.

[86] Ramona S. McNeal, Caroline J. Tolbert, Karen Mossberger, and Lisa J. Dotterweich, "Innovating in digital government in the american states," *Social Science Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2003): 52-70.

[87] Caroline J. Tolbert, Karen Mossberger, and Ramona McNeal, "Institutions, policy innovation, and E-government in the American states," *Public Administration Review* 68, no. 3 (2008): 549-63.

An alternative explanation for why treated Republicans expressed higher approval ratings for both Democratic and Republican candidates is that Republicans tend to exhibit higher levels of trust in government than Democrats.[88] Other research has found that the relationship between partisanship and trust in government is tied to which party holds the majority in Congress.[89] When I conducted this experiment back in 2016, the Republican Party controlled both the Senate and the House. Therefore, levels of trust in government among Republicans, which already tends to be higher on average, may have been magnified by a Republican-controlled Congress at the time of my survey. This might explain why Republican candidates received higher approval ratings from both Democratic and Republican subjects.

While the results of the pilot experiment are discouraging, they helped me identify ways in which I can change and improve the study design. The following chapter will describe my proposed experiment in Caracas, Venezuela. The main differences between the pilot and proposed experiments are changes in the sampling strategy and data collection plan, as well as a stronger transparency treatment.

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[88] Rima Wilkes, "We trust in government, just not in yours: Race, partisanship, and political trust, 1958–2012," *Social Science Research* 49 (2015): 356-371.

[89] Joseph Gershtenson, Jeffrey Ladewig, and Dennis L. Plane, "Parties, institutional control, and trust in government," *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2006): 882-902.

Chapter 4: Proposed Experiment

Publicly accessible government information is necessary for Venezuelan citizens to hold their government accountable, especially as the political, economic, and health crisis worsens. However, implementing transparency policies can be very costly in terms of resources required (money, human resources, technology, etc.) and there is often a perceived lack of citizen demand for transparency that further erodes the political will to carry out transparency initiatives. Generating concrete evidence of citizen demand for transparency is therefore necessary to persuade public officials to adopt transparency measures. This chapter proposes a survey experiment to find whether there is a demand for government transparency among Venezuelan citizens by testing the hypothesis that reporting on a candidate's transparency accomplishments increases their approval rating. While the original intent of my thesis was to carry out this survey experiment in Venezuela, it was not possible due to the current politically and economically volatile environment.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Strategy

I chose Caracas, Venezuela as the site of this experiment. While conducting a country-wide survey including rural and urban settings would be preferable, it is nearly impossible without access to detailed demographic data. This information is essential to design a robust sampling strategy. There is information available about population and political ideology at the municipal level for Caracas that is not available for other cities. In

addition, I chose Facebook as the method of recruitment because it is affordable, easily replicable, and ensures the anonymity of participants.

I hope to improve the design of the experiment by using stratified random sampling, as opposed to convenience sampling, within the population of Facebook users over 18 years old in Caracas. The population of Caracas will be stratified by municipality and a random sample will be drawn within each municipality. To increase the representativeness of the sample, I will draw samples relatively proportional to the population of each municipality. I cannot ensure a fully representative sample because I will be using Facebook to recruit participants. I will slightly oversample from the smaller municipalities in order to obtain a large enough sample from those areas to conduct a meaningful statistical analysis.

The majority of participants will be recruited from the municipality of Libertador, which has roughly twice the population of the other four municipalities combined (see Appendix D for a map of the five municipalities within the capital district and their population sizes). Libertador also has a predominantly pro-government and less affluent population, whereas the four smaller municipalities are more affluent and predominantly affiliated with the opposition party. Table 15 shows the proportion of the sample that will be drawn from each municipality.

Table 15: Sample Sizes by Municipality

Municipality	Population	Percentage of the Sample	Sample Size
Libertador	2,085,488	55%	1,650
Chacao	64,629	8%	240
Baruta	240,755	10%	300
El Hatillo	54,225	7%	210
Sucre	600,351	20%	600
Total Population	3,045,448	**Total Sample Size**	3,000

To determine the minimum sample size needed to minimize the probability of committing a type II error (i.e. failing to reject the null hypothesis when it is false), I conducted a power analysis using the following parameters: 0.05 significance level, 0.9 power level, two-tailed test, a standard deviation of 0.2, and a minimum acceptable effect size (MAES) of 0.18. I arrived at the MAES and standard deviation by examining the effect sizes and standard errors observed in similar experiments studying the relationship between government transparency and trust in government.[90] To be more conservative, I chose the highest standard error and lowest effect size I found in the relevant literature.[91] I chose a two-tailed test because I do not know with certainty whether the average treatment effect will be positive or negative. Although the standard power level used in social science is 0.8, I set the power level to 0.9 to ensure that my study will continue to have enough power in the case of significant attrition. Given that my study will have a balanced design, I

[90] James E. Alt, David Dreyer Lassen, and David Skilling, "Fiscal Transparency, Gubernatorial Approval, and the Scale of Government: Evidence from the States," 230-250; Stephan G. Grimmelikhuijsen and Albert J. Meijer, "Effects of transparency on the perceived trustworthiness of a government organization: Evidence from an online experiment," 137-157; Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Gregory Porumbescu, Boram Hong, and Tobin Im, "The Effect of Transparency on Trust in Government: A Cross-National Comparative Experiment," 575-586; Changsoo Song and Jooho Lee, "Citizens' use of social media in government, perceived transparency, and trust in government," 430-453.

[91] Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Gregory Porumbescu, Boram Hong, and Tobin Im, "The Effect of Transparency on Trust in Government: A Cross-National Comparative Experiment," *Public Administration Review* 73, no. 4 (2013): 581-582.

assumed that 50 percent of the study sample would be randomly assigned to the treatment groups. With these parameters set, I determined that each municipality would need to comprise at least 208 subjects to detect the MAES.[92]

I will recruit participants using Facebook advertisements. According to Facebook's Ad Manager, the social media platform hosts 86,000 active monthly users within Caracas, the capital district of Venezuela. A $30 daily budget for advertising is estimated to provide an average daily reach of between 11,000-30,000 Facebook users.[93] This method of recruitment will create some selection bias by limiting the sample to Facebook users, which most likely differ from the general population. Table 16 shows the characteristics of Facebook Users in Caracas versus Facebook Users in the country as a whole[94]. Despite the risk of selection bias, using Facebook as a recruitment and advertising tool will limit spillover effects. It will also make it easier to identify the municipalities that participants reside in without requiring them to submit their actual address and thus maintain their anonymity. Finally, this strategy will provide a methodology that is easily replicable and more affordable than working with a survey firm.

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[92] I conducted this power calculation using the 3ie Sample Size and Minimum Detectable Effect Calculator, available here: http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2016/03/22/3ie-sample-size-minimum-detectable-effect-calculator.xlsx

[93] Accessed at https://www.facebook.com/business

[94] Accessed at https://www.facebook.com/ads/audience-insights; I was not able to find this demographic data for the general population of Venezuela.

Table 16: Characteristics of Facebook Users in Venezuela

	Users in Venezuela		Users in Caracas	
Age	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
18-24	33%	30%	29%	26%
25-34	33%	31%	31%	29%
35-44	18%	19%	18%	19%
45-54	10%	11%	12%	13%
55-64	5%	6%	6%	8%
65+	3%	3%	4%	5%
Highest Level of Education				
High School	26%		28%	
College	72%		70%	
Grad School	2%		2%	

Data Collection Plan

The survey will be administered over the course of two weeks to minimize costs of running the Facebook ads. To increase the response rate, participants will be compensated with some type of monetary incentive. In the pilot experiment I used class extra credit as the main incentive. Since this incentive seemed to work well. It is likely that a monetary incentive will be similarly effective. The monetary incentive will be advertised in the Facebook ad for the study. As participants click on the link on the Facebook ad, the Qualtrics software will randomly assign subjects to the treatment and control groups. Once they complete the survey, the monetary incentive will be distributed.

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of survey respondents, I will not ask them to provide any potentially identifying information such as their name, birthday, address, or phone number. The data will be collected online via Qualtrics and stored in a privately shared folder on Google Drive that only I will have access to. Any information that might be used to identify participants (such as IP addresses) will be permanently deleted. All of

this will be made clear to participants in a consent form prior to any survey questions. Respondents will not be able to access the survey questions until they indicate that they consent to participate.

Differences between Pilot and Proposed Experiments

The main differences between the pilot and proposed experiments are in the sampling strategy and data collection plan, because this is where I encountered most of the limitations of my study. Another important difference is that I made the treatment stronger in the proposed experiment by using a more impressive transparency accomplishment. Rather than simply introducing transparency legislation, the candidate in the treatment profiles created the first municipal office of transparency and made all budget information publicly accessible through the municipality's website. The rest of the design and data analysis plan are the same in both studies in order to allow the results to be comparable. The table below summarizes the differences between the pilot and proposed experiments.

Table 17: Pilot Experiment vs. Proposed Experiment

Location	**University of Texas at Austin**	**Venezuela**
Sampling Strategy	Convenience sampling	Stratified random sampling
Sample Size	N = 869	N = 3,000
Subjects	UT undergrads	Venezuelan Facebook Users
Candidate Profiles	Democrat and Republican	Government and Opposition
Incentive	Class extra credit	Monetary Incentive

Treatment and Control Groups

Participants will answer five questions on an online survey administered via Qualtrics. The Qualtrics software can be adjusted to randomly assign subjects to treatment and control groups, as well as to ensure a balanced number of subjects between treatment

and control groups. Each participant will read one profile containing a brief list summarizing the accomplishments and stances on various issues of a hypothetical candidate. Subjects will be divided into two treatment groups and two control groups based on the political affiliation of the candidate: pro-government or opposition. As in the pilot experiment, I chose to include both political parties to observe attitudinal differences across party lines with regards to government transparency and account for political bias among the subjects. Below is a list of the two treatment groups and the two control groups:

- Treatment Group #1: The pro-government candidate's profile contains an additional accomplishment that is related to government transparency.
- Treatment Group #2: The opposition candidate's profile contains an additional accomplishment that is related to government transparency.
- Control Group #1: The pro-government candidate's profile does not contain an accomplishment that is related to government transparency.
- Control Group #2: The opposition candidate's profile does not contain an accomplishment that is related to government transparency.

To create the candidate profiles, I selected four accomplishments/stances associated with each political affiliation. The candidate profiles will be as moderate as possible by excluding extremist positions and hot-button issues such as abortion and gay marriage. By choosing moderate accomplishments and issues, the set of outcomes is more likely to approximate a normal distribution. This will, in turn, make average treatment effects easier to detect. To avoid biasing the survey responses, I will not mention the political affiliation

of the hypothetical candidate, nor will I use terminology that is associated with each political party. Please see Appendix E for the list of survey questions and candidate profiles.

Outcome Variables and Covariates

The main outcome variable in this experiment is the subjects' expressed level of approval or disapproval for each candidate. I will measure approval ratings using the following five-point Likert scale:

1: Strongly disapprove
2: Somewhat disapprove
3: Indifferent
4: Somewhat approve
5: Strongly approve

In order to capture why the subjects approve or disapprove of the candidates, I will also measure the subjects' perceptions of the candidates. I will do so by asking respondents to rate on a scale of one to five how much the following attributes describe the candidates: moral, honest, trustworthy, and "cares about people like you." I will measure perceptions of the candidates using the following five-point Likert scale:

1: Not well
2: Slightly well
3: Moderately well
4: Very well
5: Extremely well

To compare treatment effects across groups and check for possible interactions between the treatment and covariates, I will ask the subjects to provide various types of demographic information such as gender identity, racial/ethnic background, religious

preference, political affiliation, ideology, and so on. I will ask for this information at the end of the survey to avoid priming the subjects and thereby biasing their responses.

Data Analysis Plan

I will display the distribution of outcomes for the main dependent variable (approval ratings) using a histogram and a fitted distribution curve. The central peak and standard deviation of each distribution curve will provide the average outcomes and standard deviations for the treatment and control groups. I will compute the average treatment effect by calculating the difference between the central peaks of the distribution curves (i.e. by conducting a difference-in-means test). I will conduct a difference-in-means test between each treatment group and their respective control group, as well as between the two treatment groups and between the two control groups. I will employ a two tailed t-test with unequal variances to determine if the difference between means are statistically significant at the 99, 95, and 90 percent confidence levels. I chose a two-tailed test because I do not know with certainty whether the average treatment effect will be positive or negative. I will reject the null hypothesis if the difference of means is statistically significant at the 99, 95, or 90 percent confidence levels. I will test the following hypotheses:

- H_0: The transparency treatment will have no effect on approval ratings.
- H_1: The transparency treatment will have a positive effect on approval ratings.
- H_2: The transparency treatment will have a negative effect on approval ratings.
- H_3: The positive effect will be lower in Venezuela than in the US.

After testing the hypotheses, I will conduct chi-squared tests to check for possible interactions between the treatment and covariates. If there are any statistically significant interactions, I will run regressions to control for those covariates. I will then generate interaction variables to measure the effect of the treatment on each covariate.

Opposition Candidate Analysis

Table 18: Proposed Table for Opposition Candidate T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

Table 19: Proposed Table for Opposition Candidate and Opposition Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

Table 20: Proposed Table for Opposition Candidate and Pro-Government Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Pro-Government Candidate Analysis

Table 21: Proposed Table for Pro-Government Candidate T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 22: Proposed Table for Pro-Government Candidate and Opposition Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 23: Proposed Table for Pro-Government Candidate and Pro-Government Subjects T-Test Results

Outcome Variable	Control Group Mean	Treatment Group Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Opposition versus Pro-Government Analysis

Table 24: Proposed Table for Opposition v. Pro-Government Candidate (Treatment Groups)

Outcome Variable	Pro-Government Mean	Opposition Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

Table 25: Proposed Table for Opposition v. Pro-Government Candidate (Treatment Groups)

Outcome Variable	Pro-Government Mean	Opposition Mean	t-value	p-value (one tailed, negative)	p-value (two tailed)	p-value (one tailed, positive)
Approval						
Moral						
Honest						
Trustworthy						
Cares						

RISKS

One problem to consider is interference, especially since the survey will not be administered in a laboratory setting. In order to minimize spillover effects, the link to the

survey will be individualized so that participants cannot share the link with others. I will also ask survey respondents if they completed the survey with someone else and flag those participants who report doing so.

Non-compliance might also be an issue if respondents who just want the compensation answer the survey without paying attention to the questions. To detect non-compliance, I will include a screener question to make sure that the respondents are paying attention and reading the survey questions carefully. To view the screener question please refer to Appendix E.

Given the short length of my survey, I do not expect non-compliance to be a major issue. That being said, if a large enough percentage of respondents fail the screener question, I will address non-compliance in the analysis by first conducting a linear regression between the main outcome variable (approval) and the variable indicating whether the subject was assigned to treatment or control. Then I will conduct a two stage least squares regression and compare the results of both regressions. I will repeat these steps for each additional outcome variable (moral, honest, trustworthy, and "cares about people like you"). If the results are not statistically significant, then non-compliance is not a major issue.

CONCLUSION

Conducting this experiment in Venezuela will not be feasible until the current political and economic crises stabilize. Obtaining honest survey responses will be difficult

while political repression is ongoing, and therefore increases the chances of obtaining a false negative treatment effect. In addition, Venezuelan citizens might not care about government transparency right now because they have more pressing priorities, such as feeding themselves or finding life-saving medicine. The ideal situation for conducting this study would be if a political party affiliated with the opposition came into power and made policy changes to alleviate the economic crisis and restore democratic governance. Under such circumstances, public officials might place a higher value on improving the quality of governance, and Venezuelan citizens might express higher levels of trust in government.

Once the circumstances are optimal to conduct this experiment, I will need funding to recruit and compensate participants. The Facebook advertisements I will use for recruitment cost $30 per day. If I administer the survey over the course of two weeks, recruitment costs will amount to $420. How large of a monetary incentive I can afford to give participants will depend on how much funding I receive. Since the survey is brief, $5 might be sufficient incentive for participants to complete the survey. If I obtain 3,000 survey responses, the cost of compensating participants will amount to $15,000. In total, I will require a minimum of $15,420 to conduct this study.

This research is important because it could generate concrete evidence of a strong demand for government transparency in Venezuela, which is necessary to build an equally strong supply side, both of which are essential to the successful implementation of freedom of information laws in Venezuela. In addition, this study will fill a gap in the literature

about citizen demand for transparency in non-democratic, developing countries with high levels of government corruption and data opacity.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Passed the screener question:
- Yes (1): 52.25%
- No (0): 47.75%

Age:
- Less than 20 years old: 48.24%
- Between 20-23 years old: 47.41%
- Between 24-29 years old: 1.88%
- Between 30-39 years old: 0.48%

Gender:
- Male (1): 53.44%
- Female (2): 44.57%
- Prefer to self-identify (3): 0.82%
- Prefer NOT to self-identify (4): 1.17%

Religious:
- Not religious at all (1): 26.95%
- Not very religious (2): 24.04%
- Somewhat religious (3): 36.87%
- Extremely religious (4): 12.14%

Religion:
- Protestant Christian (1): 31.28%
- Roman Catholic (2): 22.99%
- Muslim (3): 3.39%
- Jewish (4): 3.39%
- Atheist (5): 8.92%
- Hindu (6): 4.02%
- Buddhist (7): 1.01%
- Other (8): 7.16%
- Agnostic (9): 17.84%

Ideology:
- Liberal (1): 28.19%
- Slightly Liberal (2): 25.15%
- Moderate (3): 24.56%
- Slightly Conservative (4): 12.75%
- Conservative (5): 9.36%

Political Party:
- Republican (1): 23.77%
- Democrat (2): 47.42%
- Independent (3): 18.74%
- Libertarian (4): 7.85%
- Other (5): 2.22%

Race:
- White (1): 49.76%
- Black (2): 3.66%
- Hispanic (3): 14.5%
- Asian (4): 22.17%
- Native (5): 0%
- Other (6): 0.83%
- Hawaiian (7): 0.12%
- Multiracial (8): 8.96%

Household Income:
- Under $19,999 (1): 7.24%
- $20,000 to $39,999 (2): 9.61%
- $40,000 to $59,000 (3): 8.54%
- $60,000 to $79,999 (4): 8.30%
- $80,000 to $99,000 (5): 8.90%
- $100,000 to $119,999 (6): 15.66%
- Over $120,000 (7): 41.76%

APPENDIX B

Control Group #1 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for US Congress. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. Voted in favor of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, otherwise known as Obamacare. This law increased health insurance coverage and affordability by requiring insurers to accept all applicants and charge the same rates regardless of pre-existing conditions or biological sex.
2. Amended the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 2003 to increase consumer privacy protections by requiring businesses to dispose properly of any client information derived from credit reports.
3. Voted against allowing gifts to Congress on behalf of lobbyists in 2006.
4. Sponsored a bill in 2013 extending subsidized federal student loan rates until 2015.
5. Voted to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell in 2010, a law that barred openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans from military service.

1. Based on the information above, how would you rate your approval of this candidate?
    1: Strongly disapprove
    2: Somewhat disapprove
    3: Indifferent
    4: Somewhat approve
    5: Strongly approve

2. In your opinion, how does the word "moral" describe this candidate?
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well
    5: Extremely well

3. In your opinion, how does the word "honest" describe this candidate?
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well
    5: Extremely well

4. In your opinion, how does the word “trustworthy” describe this candidate?
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well
    5: Extremely well

5. In your opinion, does the phrase “cares about people like you” describe this candidate:
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well
    5: Extremely well

Treatment Group #1 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for US Congress. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. Introduced the Transparency in Government Act of 2015, which seeks to expand disclosure requirements for the personal financial information of Members of Congress and for foreign travel, gifts, earmarks, and representational allowances.
2. Voted in favor of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, otherwise known as Obamacare. This law increased health insurance coverage and affordability by requiring insurers to accept all applicants and charge the same rates regardless of pre-existing conditions or biological sex.
3. Amended the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 2003 to increase consumer privacy protections by requiring businesses to dispose properly of any client information derived from credit reports.
4. Voted against allowing gifts to Congress on behalf of lobbyists in 2006.
5. Sponsored a bill in 2013 extending subsidized federal student loan rates until 2015.
6. Voted to repeal Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell in 2010, a law that barred openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans from military service.

(Questions 1-5 are the same)

Control Group #2 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for US Congress. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a

candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. Voted against extending legal rights for prisoners in the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp in 2006.
2. Introduced a bill in 2010 that would block the Environmental Protection Agency from increasing emission regulations on industries.
3. Voted in favor of the Marriage Protection Amendment in 2006, which called for a constitutional ban of same-sex marriage.
4. Sponsored the Keystone XL Pipeline Approval Act in 2015, a bill to approve the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline from Canada to Nebraska.
5. Voted against the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, otherwise known as Obamacare. This law expanded health insurance coverage and affordability by requiring insurers to accept all applicants and charge the same rates regardless of pre-existing conditions or biological sex.

(Questions 1-5 are the same)

Treatment Group #2 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for US Congress. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. Introduced the Transparency in Government Act of 2015, which seeks to expand disclosure requirements for the personal financial information of Members of Congress and for foreign travel, gifts, earmarks, and representational allowances.
2. Voted against extending legal rights for prisoners in the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp in 2006.
3. Introduced a bill in 2010 that would block the Environmental Protection Agency from increasing emission regulations on industries.
4. Voted in favor of the Marriage Protection Amendment in 2006, which called for a constitutional ban of same-sex marriage.
5. Sponsored the Keystone XL Pipeline Approval Act in 2015, a bill to approve the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline from Canada to Nebraska.
6. Voted against the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, otherwise known as Obamacare. This law expanded health insurance coverage and affordability by requiring insurers to accept all applicants and charge the same rates regardless of pre-existing conditions or biological sex.

(Questions 1-5 are the same)

Screener Question

People are very busy these days and many do not have time to follow what goes on in the government. Some do pay attention to politics but do not read the questions carefully. To show that you've read this much, please ignore the question below and just select the bottom two options.

How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?

1. Extremely interested
2. Very interested
3. Moderately interested
4. Mildly interested
5. Not at all interested

APPENDIX C

Table 26: Treatment Group #1 Dependent Variable Distribution (Democratic Candidate)

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
approval	219	3.817352	1.20529	1	5
moral	219	3.534247	1.032706	1	5
honest	219	3.347032	.9852713	1	5
trustworthy	219	3.187215	1.030107	1	5
cares	219	3.255708	1.132668	1	5

Table 27: Control Group #1 Dependent Variable Distribution (Democratic Candidate)

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
approval	223	3.856502	1.161329	1	5
moral	223	3.58296	1.000485	1	5
honest	223	3.336323	.9342719	1	5
trustworthy	223	3.255605	.9454264	1	5
cares	223	3.29148	1.284092	1	5

Table 28: Treatment Group #2 Dependent Variable Distribution (Republican Candidate)

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
approval	209	2.019139	1.168339	1	5
moral	209	1.866029	1.038325	1	5
honest	209	2.645933	1.009091	1	5
trustworthy	209	2.148325	1.06609	1	5
cares	209	1.875598	1.106722	1	5

Table 29: Control Group #2 Dependent Variable Distribution (Republican Candidate)

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
approval	218	1.894495	1.200179	1	5
moral	218	1.807339	.9974813	1	5
honest	218	2.688073	1.070744	1	5
trustworthy	218	2.169725	1.083432	1	5
cares	218	1.802752	1.128839	1	5

APPENDIX D

Figure 7: Map of the Five Municipalities in the Federal District of Caracas Color-Coded Based on Population Size[95]

95 "Área Metropolitana de Caracas." DaTuOpinion.com. 2011. Accessed at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/Distrito_metropolitano_de_caracas.svg

APPENDIX E

Control Group #1 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for President of Venezuela. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. Supported the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, which prevents radio and television stations from transmitting any content deemed to encourage public disturbances by subjecting them to hefty fines or suspension of their licenses.
2. Granted 20 parcels of land to the central government for the construction of public housing.
3. Voted in favor of the Law of Fair Prices, which says that no business can have a profit margin above 30 percent of the cost of production.

1. Based on the information above, how would you rate your approval of this candidate?
    1: Strongly disapprove
    2: Somewhat disapprove
    3: Indifferent
    4: Somewhat approve
    5: Strongly approve

2. In your opinion, how does the word "moral" describe this candidate?
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well
    5: Extremely well

3. In your opinion, how does the word "honest" describe this candidate?
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well
    5: Extremely well

4. In your opinion, how does the word "trustworthy" describe this candidate?
    1: Not well
    2: Slightly well
    3: Moderately well
    4: Very well

5: Extremely well

5. In your opinion, does the phrase "cares about people like you" describe this candidate:
   1: Not well
   2: Slightly well
   3: Moderately well
   4: Very well
   5: Extremely well

Treatment Group #1 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for President of Venezuela. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. While serving as mayor, the candidate created the first municipal office of transparency and made all budget information publically accessible through the municipality's website.
2. Supported the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, which prevents radio and television stations from transmitting any content deemed to encourage public disturbances by subjecting them to hefty fines or suspension of their licenses.
3. Granted 20 parcels of land to the central government for the construction of public housing.
4. Voted in favor of the Law of Fair Prices, which says that no business can have a profit margin above 30 percent of the cost of production.

(Questions 1-5 are the same)

Control Group #2 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for President of Venezuela. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. Supported the Law of Granting Property Titles to Beneficiaries of the "Gran Misión Vivienda" (Great Housing Mission), which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.
2. Achieved the highest level of trust in municipal police by requiring background checks, providing training, and increasing police salaries.
3. Voted in favor of the Law to Address the National Health Crisis, which forces the central government to accept international humanitarian aid.

Treatment Group #2 Survey

The following accomplishments and stances on various issues pertain to a candidate for President of Venezuela. Although this information might not be enough to properly judge a candidate, please do your best to answer the survey questions based on your first impression of the candidate.

1. While serving as mayor, the candidate created the first municipal office of transparency and made all budget information publically accessible through the municipality's website.
2. Supported the Law of Granting Property Titles to Beneficiaries of the "Gran Misión Vivienda" (Great Housing Mission), which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.
3. Achieved the highest level of trust in municipal police by requiring background checks, providing training, and increasing police salaries.
4. Voted in favor of the Law to Address the National Health Crisis, which forces the central government to accept international humanitarian aid.

(Questions 1-5 are the same)

Screener Question

People are very busy these days and many do not have time to follow what goes on in government. Some do pay attention to politics but do not read the questions carefully. To show that you've read this much, please ignore the question below and just select the bottom two options.

How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?

1. Extremely interested
2. Very interested
3. Moderately interested
4. Mildly interested
5. Not at all interested

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